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Little Rock Arsenal Crisis

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Message from the Editor

In this issue of the *Arkansas Military History Journal*, historian David Sesser, of Henderson State University, investigates the Little Rock Crisis of 1861, on the cusp of the Civil War. The Arkansas militia played a big role during the winter and spring incident, which is vitally important to understanding the Civil War in Arkansas.

In his Featured Artifact article, allow LTC Matthew Anderson to take you on the journey of the history of the famous, or infamous, Thompson Submachine Gun from its inception to the end of manufacturing. The Thompson, also known as the Tommy Gun, has an interesting and complex history. The Arkansas National Guard Museum has a Thompson on display.

We hope you enjoy these two compelling articles.

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**“Should the People Assemble in Their Own Defense?”
Militia and Volunteer Units in the Little Rock Arsenal Crisis**



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Shouts and jeers hurled through the cold air, aimed at a column of Federal troops marching through downtown Little Rock. Emanating from several groups of volunteer troops from across the state, the abuse directed at the professional soldiers was also in part directed at the militia members dividing the two groups. The absurd situation found members of the Little Rock Capitol Guards militia company escorting members of Battery F, Second United States Artillery, all surrounded by pro-secessionist volunteers. Eventually the column exited

the city and the Federal troops camped at Fletcher's Landing where they remained until a steamboat arrived to transport them to St. Louis.

The odd incident involving multiple military units occurred on February 8, 1861. Hundreds of armed men descended on the city the previous week in response to a political crisis engineered by the newly elected governor Henry Rector. In response to these men arriving in the city, the Little Rock City Board called out their local militia unit. Long simmering tensions between the members of the various units made the situation unstable and the potential for violence to erupt on the streets of Little Rock appeared to be a real possibility. The role that both militia units and volunteer troops played in what became known as the Little Rock Arsenal Crisis brought the threat of violence to the streets of the city, increasing the likelihood of the outbreak of war.

Newly elected Arkansas Governor Henry Rector took office on November 15, 1850. Elected in August, Rector obtained his position due to a confluence of events that allowed him to oppose a weak opponent and take advantage of a disorganized Democratic Party. A native of Kentucky, his first cousins James and Elias Conway both served as governor of Arkansas. Moving to the state as a teenager, Rector worked in several professions and benefited from political patronage. A member of The Family, which controlled state politics from the territorial days, Rector served several terms in the General Assembly and in 1859 won a seat on the State Supreme Court. He remained on the court less than a year as his rulings were deemed to be particularly inept.¹

¹ Waddy D. Moore, "Henry Massie Rector," in *Governors of Arkansas: Essays in Political Biography*, eds. Timothy Donovan and Willard Gatewood (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas

In the face of this failure, Rector broke with the traditional Democratic party in the state and entered the 1860 gubernatorial race as an Independent Democrat. Desperate to demonstrate that rather, belonging to the elite ruling class in the state, he was just a simple farmer from Saline County, Rector's quest ultimately proved to be successful. The outcome did not rely on his campaigning but rather than on the lackluster campaign waged by his main opponent, Family backed Democrat Richard Johnson.²

With his election in August, Rector took office on November 15, 1860. He quickly realized that although he held the highest executive office in the state, he did not have much influence among members of the General Assembly. Many members of both houses of the state legislature either belonged to the Family or served as close allies of the group. In order to build support to push his agenda through the legislature, Rector focused on the issue of secession. With the election of Abraham Lincoln in November, the calls for southern states to leave the Union reached a crescendo. Rector seized on the unpopularity in Arkansas of the president-elect, who did not receive any votes in the state, and addressed the issue in his inaugural address. Speaking before the General Assembly on November 15, the governor

Press, 1981), 30-31; Michael Dougan, "A Look at the 'Family' in Arkansas Politics, 1858-1865" *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 29 (Summer 1970), 102.

² Little Rock *Old Line Democrat*, May 24, 1860; Jeannie Whayne, Michael Dougan, and Waddy Moore, s.v. "Henry Massie Rector," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=119> (accessed January 3, 2013); Thomas DeBlack, s.v. "The Family [Political Dynasty]," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2666> (accessed January 3, 2013).

called for the state to leave the Union to avoid any chance of Lincoln interfering in the affairs of the state. With the likelihood of a dissolution of the Union now eminent, Rector argued that Arkansas should support the movements of other southern states and join with them in the event that war actually began.³

The legislators promptly ignored the call for secession from the governor and conducted regular business for most of the remainder of the session. Joined by other politicians who did not claim membership in the Family, Rector continued to push the cause of secession.



Hindman, Thomas C., WICR 31880, in the collection of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. Image courtesy of the National Park Service.

Representative Thomas C. Hindman, congressman for the First Congressional District, joined the call, using his newspaper to encourage citizens to flood their legislators with letters and petitions supporting the issue. Hindman's *Old Line Democrat* called for secession in every issue and petitions arrived in Little Rock from counties across eastern and southern Arkansas, imploring the General Assembly to address the issue.⁴

The state House of Representatives finally moved on the issue, approving a popular referendum to be held on February 18, 1861. The election placed two questions before the

³ Inaugural Address of Governor Henry M. Rector, *Arkansas Gazette*, November 24, 1860; James Gigantino II, *Slavery and Secession in Arkansas: A Documentary History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2015), 30-32; Michael B. Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier State in Wartime* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 33.

⁴ Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas*, 36-38.

voters. The first question on the ballot asked voters if they supported calling a convention and the second question asked voters to select representatives for the convention, if the first question passed. After the passage of the bill by the House calling for the election, the state Senate ignored the legislation until January 16, 1861. By this time, the situation in Little Rock already began to deteriorate.⁵

Located on the southern edge of the city, the United States in Little Rock housed



Drawing of the Arsenal building. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

thousands of weapons and millions of rounds of ammunition. Constructed on the site of a former racetrack, the arsenal dated to 1837, just a year after Arkansas entered the Union. With Arkansas's location on the edge of the frontier, state politicians lobbied the Federal government to construct the facility to help arm the population to defend the state in a time of crisis. By 1860, the arsenal complex

included a total of twenty-eight buildings. Barracks, stables, and other structures supported the operations at the facility. With increased westward expansion in the decades after the construction of the arsenal and the establishment of Fort Smith on the western edge of the state

⁵ Ralph Wooster, "The Arkansas Secession Convention," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1954): 173.

in 1838, the need to continually garrison the facility decreased. By late 1860, only a small number of caretakers worked at the arsenal, tasked with caring for the weapons.⁶

On January 21, 1861, a report delivered to the House of Representatives of the United States Congress detailed the number of arms held by the Federal government across the county. A total of 1,364 percussion small arms were held in Arkansas at this time. Of these weapons, 54 were rifles, which also appeared on the 1859 report for the Little Rock Arsenal. An additional 1,310 muskets appear on the inventory. It is unclear if these weapons were held at the arsenal in Little Rock or if this number included both the weapons at that location as well as at Fort Smith. These totals did not include any flintlock arms or revolvers, which were held at both installations. Also appearing on the inventory at this time were ten pieces of brass field artillery. Six of these weapons were located at Fort Smith and likely belonged to Battery E of the Second US Artillery, the sister unit of Battery F in Little Rock.⁷

⁶ James Eison, "The Arsenal in Little Rock," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 16 (June 1968): 17; Duane Huddleston, "Building the Little Rock Arsenal," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 20 (December 1972): 45-46; *Arkansas Gazette*, May 30, 1837; Thomas Ezell, "'To Avoid an Effusion of Blood...': The Little Rock Crisis of 1861" (Unpublished paper, n.d.).

⁷ Report of Colonel Henry Craig, Chief of Ordnance, November 12, 1859. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: 1880-1901), Series III, Volume I, 1. (Hereby cited afterward as *O.R.*); Report of Colonel Henry Craig, January 15, 1861, *O.R.*, Series III, Volume I, 39; Report of Colonel Henry Craig, January 21, 1861, *O.R.*, Series III, Volume I, 42-23.



*Captain James Totten.
Totten, James, WICR 31808,
in the collection of Wilson's
Creek National Battlefield.
Image courtesy of the
National Park Service*

With tensions growing across the South, the War Department moved units to previously ungarrisoned posts. Receiving orders to move to the arsenal on November 21, 1860, Captain James Totten ordered his command, Battery B, Second United States Artillery, to prepare to travel from Fort Smith to the capital. Only recently arrived from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the battery consisted of seventy-three enlisted men and three officers. When the unit arrived in Little Rock, Totten took command of the post, with a total garrison of ninety men. The officer commanding the arsenal at the time of Totten's arrival was his stepbrother, Captain Richard Fatherly, who served as a military storekeeper. Disembarking at a landing on the Arkansas River on December 6, the unit marched through the streets of the city to the arsenal. Totten preceded his men, arriving in Little Rock several days before the bulk of the battery, spending more than two weeks socializing with members of upper society. The son of a prominent physician in the city who served at the arsenal earlier in his career, Totten was well known in Little Rock. Upon reaching the arsenal, the troops settled into a typical garrison routine. Facing north, the eastern edge of the arsenal bordered St. John's College with private homes on the northern and western edges of the grounds. The land to the south of the post remained undeveloped at the time.⁸

⁸ Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861"; Report of Colonel Samuel Cooper, Adjutant General of the United States Army, January 18, 1861. Series III, Volume I, pp. 47-48; Michael Ingrisano, *An Artilleryman's War: Gus Dey and the 2nd United States Artillery* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1998), 46.

The city remained quiet during the Christmas season with Totten attending numerous parties and his men continuing normal operations at the facility. Governor Rector understood that the mere presence of the troops at the arsenal could support his push to lead Arkansas out of the Union. In late January, Rector decided to seize on the issue of troops at the arsenal and wrote to Totten to in effect challenge the officer's control of the Federal property. Later transmitted to Washington by Totten, the letter from Rector read in part:

“The public exigencies require me to make known to you that the U.S. Arsenal at this place will be permitted to remain in the possession of the Federal officers until the State, by authority of the people, shall have determined to sever their connection with the General Government, unless, however, it should be thought proper to order additional forces to this point: or, on the other hand, an attempt should be made to remove or destroy the munitions of war deposited in said arsenal. Any assurances that you may be able to give touching the observance of these two latter conditions will greatly tend to quiet the public mind, and present a collision between the sovereign people of Arkansas and the Government troops now stationed at this point.”

In this message, Rector made several claims that proved to only inflame the situation. Dated January 28, Rector's communication declared that the citizens of the state would decide to leave the Union, even though the referendum to determine in a secession convention would even be held was not scheduled for another three weeks. The governor also issued a veiled threat to Totten, telling the officer to neither receive any reinforcements or move or transport any of the munitions held at the post.⁹

Requesting instructions from his superiors in Washington, Totten replied to the governor the next day. In his reply, Totten informed Rector that he knew of no information about reinforcements being dispatched to the arsenal and privately did not believe that the

⁹ Governor Henry Rector, Correspondence with Captain James Totten, January 29, 1861, *O.R.*, Series I, Volume I, 638-639.

weapons at the arsenal would be ordered destroyed. He also claimed that it was his understanding that the troops arrived at the arsenal at the request of unnamed Arkansas members of Congress. Striking a respectful tone throughout most of the communication, he did make clear his duty as an officer in the United States Army. He wrote in part:

“I...remind your excellency that as an officer of the Army of the United States, my allegiance is due to that Government in whose [service] I am, and that I act by its authority and permission, and until absolved from that allegiance my honor is concerned in the faithful performance of what I may conceive to be my duty.”

Politely but firmly, Totten informed the governor of the oath that he took when receiving a commission.¹⁰

Along with the correspondence with Rector, Captain Totten sent messages to his superiors in Washington detailing the situation. Despite his repeated requests for instructions during the crisis, Totten did not receive any guidance. Reporting directly to the Adjutant General of the United States Army, Colonel Samuel Cooper, Totten eventually begged for orders. Unbeknownst to Totten, Cooper was likely planning his own resignation from the army during the crisis. A native New Yorker, Cooper married a Virginian and owned slaves. He eventually resigned on March 7, 1861, and received a commission as a brigadier general in the Confederate army ten days later. Cooper became the ranking general in the Confederate army

¹⁰ Captain James Totten, Correspondence with Governor Henry Rector, January 29, 1861, *O.R.*, Series I, Volume I, 639.

on May 16, 1861, becoming the first of seven men promoted to the rank of full general, serving as Adjutant General and Inspector General during the conflict.¹¹

The line of communication between Little Rock and Washington was greatly shortened on January 30, 1861, with the activation of a telegraph line running through Des Arc to Memphis, allowing Totten to easily communicate with his commanders, although he never received a response. To celebrate the opening of the telegraph line, local United States Attorney John Harrell composed the first message. Unsure of what type of information to share, Harrell decided to simply pass on a number of rumors that floated around the capital city, including some related to the events at the arsenal.¹²

In his message, Harrell claimed that additional reinforcements for the arsenal were en route to Fort Gibson in the Indian Territory. He additionally reported that all Federal outposts west of Fort Smith were abandoned and the troops were converging on that point. The information in Harrell's communication was not true, yet it had a major impact on the situation in Little Rock. In honor of the opening of the telegraph line, multiple cities in the state listened in on the events reported from the capital, including Helena. The Mississippi River port served as an important location in the state for the shipment of large-scale crops including cotton and

¹¹ Captain James Totten, Correspondence with Colonel Samuel Cooper, January 29, 1861, *O.R.*, Series I, Volume I, 638; Ezra Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 62-63.

¹² Bruce Allardice, *Confederate Colonels: A Biographical Register* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 183; Margret Ross, *Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866* (Little Rock: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969), 352.

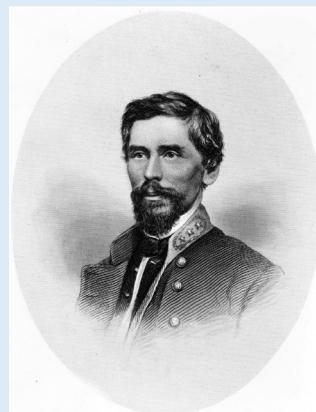
much of the community's economy depended on the slave trade. A hotbed of secession and the home of Congressman Thomas C. Hindman, citizens in the town held a mass meeting immediately after the message from Harrell came over the line. In response to the news of impending reinforcements, local citizens composed a message offering 500 men to capture the arsenal.¹³

Addressing the communication to Rector, the message instead went to Adjutant General Edmund Burgevin, who also happened to be the governor's brother in law. As the commander of all civilian military forces in the state, Burgevin could accept the offered forces into active service. Burgevin quickly delivered the message to Rector who contemplated a response. The governor knew that the arrival of military forces in Little Rock could tip the scale in his favor, forcing Totten to surrender the arsenal. Even with this in mind, Rector hesitated before responding. As Arkansas had not withdrawn from the Union, Rector knew that if he called upon these citizen forces and the state ultimately did not secede, his actions could be construed as an act of rebellion. In order to encourage the forces to move to Little Rock while not taking responsibility for their command, he issued a carefully worded reply. It read in part "The governor has no authority to summon you to take possession of a Federal post, whether threatened to be reinforced or not. Should the people assemble in their own defense,

¹³ Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, 352; John Harrell, *Confederate Military History*, Volume X (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1962), 6-7; Diane Neal and Thomas Kremm, *The Lion of the South: General Thomas C. Hindman* (Macon, GA; Mercer University Press, 1997), 22.

the governor will interpose his official position in their behalf.” With this response, Rector all but ensured that forces would quickly arrive in the city and likely inflame the situation.¹⁴

Upon receipt of the response, the Yell Guards and the Philips County Guards prepared to move to the capital. Both units drilled regularly, with the training tempo increasing over the previous months as secession appeared imminent. The militia companies prepared by gathering weapons and supplies for the possible storming of the arsenal. Patrick, commander of the Yell



Patrick Cleburne. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Guards, led his company to the bank of the Mississippi River where they boarded the steamer *Fredrick Notrobe*. The Philips County Guards joined their compatriots on the boat, which steamed down the river to Napoleon, Arkansas, and entered the Arkansas River. The craft arrived in Little Rock early on the morning of February 5, 1861, with the citizens of the city awakening to find armed militia patrolling the streets.¹⁵

Other units from across the state joined the troops from Helena, with companies dispatched from Hot Spring, Jefferson, Monroe, Montgomery, Prairie, Saline, St. Francis, and

¹⁴ *Journal of Both Sessions of the Convention of the State of Arkansas* (Little Rock: Johnson and Yerkes, State Printer, 1861), 48; Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas*, 41; Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, 352-353; Harrell, *Confederate Military History*, 8.

¹⁵ Howell and Elizabeth Purdue, *Pat Cleburne: Confederate General* (Hillsboro, Texas; Hill Junior College Press, 1973), 70; Craig Symonds, *Stonewall of the West: Patrick Cleburne and the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 46; Scoggs, Jack B. “Arkansas in the Secession Crisis.” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (Autumn 1953).

201; Ezell, “The Little Rock Crisis of 1861.”

White counties. Rector reported after the conclusion of the crisis that the number of armed men in the city approached 800. As the volunteers increased, the residents of Little Rock became increasingly distressed, fearing the outbreak of violence in the streets if these groups decided to attack the arsenal and the Federal troops at the post defended their position. In response to the tense situation, the Little Rock City Council met on the afternoon of February 5 and approved a resolution calling for Rector to take control of the militia before violence erupted and the men attacked the arsenal without approval. The following day the council met again and passed a second resolution calling for both sides to stand down. With the resolutions delivered to both the governor and Totten, the council took one final action on February 6 when the body approved a motion to call out the Little Rock militia unit, the Capitol Guards.¹⁶

Organized in 1836, the company then known as the Little Rock Guards served in the



Mexican-American War as part of the Arkansas Volunteer Cavalry Regiment. Under the command of Captain Albert Pike, the company distinguished itself at the Battle of Buena Vista when the remainder of the Arkansas regiment broke and retreated in confusion. Before the engagement opened, Pike's company received orders to operate with the 2nd United States Dragoons

¹⁶ *Journal of Both Sessions of the State of Arkansas* (Little Rock: Johnson and Yerkes, State Printers, 1861) 49; Little Rock City Council Resolution, February 5, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 641; Little Rock City Council Resolution, February 5, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 641-2; Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861"; Des Arc *Constitutional Union*, February 15, 1861.

and participated in the success of that unit. Colonel Archibald Yell, commander of the Arkansas regiment and the second governor of the state, lost his life in the engagement while trying to rally his men. The professionalism of the company from Little Rock as compared to their comrades in the regiment created some animosity before the battle. While serving in Texas, the Little Rock company regularly drilled while the other companies avoided the intense heat and remained in the shade. The backgrounds of the men in the regiment also deepened the divide between the companies, which only increased after the war.¹⁷

By 1860, Little Rock boasted by far the largest population of any settlement in the state. The city included 3,727 white citizens and 1,100 slaves according to the census completed that year, far outpacing every other settlement in Arkansas. With such a large population, the economy of the city operated differently than most of the state. While the majority of the population in Arkansas worked daily with agricultural enterprises, Little Rock included manufacturing facilities, newspapers, St. Johns' Masonic College, and included a large number of tradespeople. While almost a quarter of the residents of the city at the time of the arsenal crisis lived in bondage, they were different in a number of ways from the majority of slaves in the state. The bulk of enslaved people in Arkansas worked as agricultural laborers but many

¹⁷ Walter Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 227-229; Walter Brown, "The Mexican War Experiences of Albert Pike and the 'Mounted Devils' of Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* XII (Winter, 1953), 301-302; William Frazier, "Rackensack in the Field: Arkansans in the U.S.-Mexican War," in *Ready, Booted, and Spurred: Arkansas in the U.S. Mexican War*, ed. Mark Christ (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2009), 43.

of those in Little Rock worked in industries. With a diversified economy, the large number of slaves necessary for the production of row crops were not required. Many of the volunteers from across the state hailed from communities dependent on slave labor. These volunteers came from communities completely dependent on large scale agricultural enterprises based on utilizing an enslaved workforce. In contrast, the Capitol Guards included educated and professional men. While few of the men serving in these militia units served in the Mexican War, these differences between the volunteers and the Capitol Guards made an already tense situation worse.¹⁸

Included in the ranks of the Capitol Guards were members of the leading families in the city. Captain Peay served as the Mayor of Little Rock from 1859 to 1861. Lieutenant John Gould Fletcher hailed from a planter family with holdings in Saline and Pulaski counties. After the war, he joined fellow member of the Capitol Guards, Peter Hotze, in creating a large mercantile business named Fletcher and Hotze. Fletcher's son John Gould Fletcher Jr. received the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and his daughter Adolphine Fletcher Terry was active in a number of social and philanthropic causes, including the opposition to the closure of Little Rock schools after the 1957 Central High School Crisis. The family resided in a home constructed

¹⁸ William O'Donnell. *The Civil War Quadrennium: A Narrative History of Day-to-Day Life in Little Rock, Arkansas During the American War Between the States, 1861-1865* (Little Rock: Civil War Roundtable of Arkansas, 1985), III-V; Orville Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 111-13.

by Albert Pike around 1840. Lawyers, clerks, and large-scale landowners numbered among the parents of the other members of the company.¹⁹

Members of the Yell Rifles held similar professional positions within their community. With engineers, lawyers, and pharmacists in the ranks of the company, the unit did not reflect the agricultural background of the community from which it hailed. Although the members of the company held similar social ranks to their counterparts in the Capitol Guards, the background of the two communities led those from eastern Arkansas to move on the arsenal. With roughly twenty-three percent of the population of Little Rock enslaved in 1860, slavery was an important part of the capital's economy. In the same Census, Phillips County reported that 8,941 slaves resided in the county out of a total population of 14,876. With sixty percent of the population enslaved and containing more slaves than any other county in the state, the entire economy of Phillips County relied on the peculiar institution.²⁰

Camped on the grounds of the Statehouse on Markham Street, the armed volunteers reacted with surprise at the arrival of the Capitol Guards. Assembling at the home of Captain



Capital Guards Monument at the Arsenal. Photo by David Sesser.

Gordon Peay, the company marched to the Statehouse where the unit established a perimeter around the seat of government. Understanding the likelihood of an outbreak of violence would emanate from the volunteers rather than the

¹⁹ Calvin Collier, *First In-Last Out: The Capitol Guards, Arkansas Brigade in the Civil War* (Little Rock: Pioneer Press, 1961), 11-15; 1860 Census of the United States.

²⁰ Taylor, *Negro Slavery*, 52.

soldiers at the arsenal, the Capitol Guards determined that the easiest way to prevent this from occurring was to surround the armed civilians. Preventing the volunteers from moving the approximate mile to the grounds of the arsenal, the Capitol Guards both protected the arsenal and the citizens of Little Rock. As the members of the units at the Statehouse realized why the Capitol Guards surrounded them, they responded with catcalls and insults aimed at the Little Rock unit. Even with the tensions between the Capitol Guards and the volunteers, potential for violence erupting between the two groups was minimal. With fellow Arkansans serving in the role of guards, the situation deescalated. If Totten used part of his small force to fill a similar role, the likelihood of violence would increase. The activation of the Capitol Guards by the city council proved to be at least somewhat of a calming event on the situation.²¹

With the potential for violence in the streets temporarily reduced, citizens of Little Rock held a mass meeting in the city. At the event, those assembled agreed that the governor needed to take control of the situation. Understanding that the militia at the Statehouse only arrived in the city due to Rector's opaque communication, citizens at the meeting assembled a delegation to visit the governor. Arriving at Rector's office at the Statehouse, the group demanded that the governor take control of the armed men milling about on the lawn. Arguing that if the arsenal should fall to military forces in the state, the governor must be in command of the units. Only the surrender of the post to state officers who would then secure the weapons held at the arsenal could prevent an outbreak of violence in the streets. Promising to end the situation within a matter of days, Rector knew at the end of the meeting that he had some support amongst the citizens of the capital city, albeit tepid, to seize the arsenal. By allowing armed

²¹ Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861."

militia to descend upon the city without taking responsibility for their command, Rector forced the citizens of Little Rock to demand he actually capture the arsenal to prevent the potential outbreak of violence.²²

Calling former governor John Selden Roane to take command of the assembled militia, Rector finally took responsibility for armed men in the streets. The selection of Roane as the commander of the assembled militia made an interesting choice with his personal history with the Capitol Guards. Roane served as the lieutenant colonel in the Arkansas Volunteer Cavalry Regiment during the Mexican War and ended his service as the commanding officer of the unit after the death of Colonel Yell. When a report from Pike criticizing the conduct of the regiment during the Battle of Buena Vista appeared in the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1847, Roane responded angrily. Pike called for a court of inquiry which eventually vindicated him and his company, but Roane continued to express his displeasure over the incident, leading to a duel between the men on July 29, 1847, on the bank of the Arkansas River in the Indian Territory. The duel ended with both men grazed after two exchanges of fire but with each party satisfied.²³

With Roane now in official command of the assembled volunteer units, Rector took this opportunity to move forward with his plan to capture the arsenal by force if necessary. Ordering the two companies from Helena to arms, the men marched through the streets from the Capitol to the grounds of the arsenal. With Roane in command with the approval of the governor, the Capitol Guards were powerless to stop the advance of the volunteer units. Roane

²² Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861."

²³ Des Arc *Constitutional Union*, February 15, 1861; Brown, *Life of Albert Pike*, 240.

selected the Helena units to lead the movement as the two companies were judged to be the best drilled among the units in the city.²⁴

Totten watched the evolving situation with increasing concern, telegraphing Washington again on February 6 requesting instructions. He wrote in part “Companies of armed citizens from various sections of the State have already arrived, and it is said there will soon be five thousand here for the express purpose of taking this arsenal. Instructions are urgently and immediately asked.” Understanding that the situation could quickly spiral out of control, Totten desperately requested instructions but never received a reply.²⁵

Another message from Rector to the arsenal prompted the communication from Totten to Washington. In the letter to Totten, the governor wrote that a large but unknown number of armed civilians had arrived in the city to capture the arsenal. He continued, “Reliable information has been received that a large force of citizens are on the march to this place for the same purpose...This movement, although not authorized by me, has assumed such an aspect that it becomes my duty, as the executive of this State, to interpose my official authority to prevent a collision between the people of the State and the Federal troops under your command.” Rector continued the communication by demanding the surrender of the arsenal to “possibly prevent the effusion of blood and the destruction of the property of the citizens and the Government.” The remainder of the message detailed the process that Rector proposed to take control of the arsenal. The weapons held by the arsenal would pass to control of the state

²⁴ Ezell, “The Little Rock Crisis of 1861.”

²⁵ Captain James Totten, Correspondence with Colonel Samuel Cooper, February 6, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 639.

until the proposed Secession Convention met on March 4. Rector once again assumed not only that the convention would be approved by the voters but the state would leave the Union at the conclusion of the event. There does not seem to be a plan created in the event that the convention did not proceed or if Arkansas remained in the Union.²⁶

Struggling to decide, Totten spoke with his fellow officers at the arsenal. While he served as the commander of the post, First Lieutenant Anderson Merchant and Second Lieutenant St. Clair Dearing also served in the battery. Dearing advised Totten to surrender the post in order to prevent bloodshed. Dearing's motives for such advice are suspect as he resigned from the army before the start of the crisis in order to return home to Georgia. During the crisis, he awaited approval of his resignation, continuing to serve in the interim. It is unclear if Merchant offered similar advice. Several civilians visited Totten during the crisis, imploring him to do everything in his power to avoid violence. As the son of a prominent member of the Little Rock community, Totten struggled to make a decision that would put many of his friends in harm's way.²⁷

With pressure coming from both within the ranks of his command and from the civilians outside the post, Totten realized that his only option was to surrender. Without any

²⁶ Governor Henry Rector, Correspondence with Captain James Totten, February 6, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 640.

²⁷ "Passing Events," *Arkansas State Gazette*, February 9, 1861, p. 2.

instructions from Washington, Totten made the decision on his own based on his observations of the situation.²⁸

In an effort to obtain the most favorable terms as possible, Totten wrote Rector late on February 6. Rather than surrender the arsenal to militia troops, Totten asked that control of the post and the munitions pass directly to the control of the governor who would then hold the items in trust until the national situation was settled. Other terms proposed by Totten including allowing all items brought from Fort Smith to the post, delivered to the arsenal during his posting in Little Rock, and all personal property to be taken by the troops when evacuated. In order to depart the facility with a minimum likelihood of bloodshed, Totten also requested that the troops be allowed to move in any direction they wished to depart the state as quickly as possible. Rector realized that by accepting these terms, he would accomplish his goal of seizing the arsenal and would potentially be hailed as a hero, especially if the state departed the Union in the near future as he predicted. He did clarify one portion of the surrender terms. While the men of the battery served as artillerymen, they did not actually bring their fieldpieces with them from Fort Smith to the capital. Rather, they used four artillery pieces already housed at the facility. Rector demanded that these cannon not be removed and Totten agreed.²⁹

²⁸ Memorandum signed by Captain James Totten and Governor Henry Rector, February 8, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 644-45; Captain James Totten, Correspondence with Colonel Samuel Cooper, February 9, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 645.

²⁹ Captain James Totten, Correspondence with Colonel Samuel Cooper, February 6, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 643; Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861."

With this agreement, most of the hostility that permeated the air over Little Rock dissipated. Totten ordered Dearing to prepare the enlisted men to depart the arsenal as soon as practical on February 8. Militia officers met with their Federal counterparts to complete an inventory of the munitions at the arsenal with four copies of the listing of items created. Rector and Totten each signed the documents with the final copy containing a memorandum detailing the build up to the surrender and explaining the captain's decision to surrender. In part it read that Totten "took, of necessity, the responsibility of doing what he thought proper and best under all the circumstances, desiring to avoid cause of civil war in this Government, by the first instance of hostile and bloody collision." With this document, Totten strived to make clear that the only reason he surrendered the arsenal was to avoid conflict with the assembled militia units occupying the city.³⁰

With the completion of the inventory and the packing of personal belongings, the troops prepared to march to the Arkansas River. With few available transportation options, Totten chose to wait on a steamboat at the landing to transport his command down the Arkansas and up the Mississippi River. With the quickly unfolding events of the previous week, camping at the landing was the best choice. Located about seven miles outside of the city, it would provide the command some protection from the volunteer units still in Little Rock. Escorted by the

³⁰ Memorandum signed by Captain James Totten and Governor Henry Rector, February 8, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 644-45; Ezell, "The Little Rock Crisis of 1861."

Capitol Guards, the troops marched through the city streets and into the countryside southeast of the city, arriving at the landing late on the afternoon of February 8.³¹

In honor of his skill in avoiding conflict during the crisis, a group of women in Little Rock commissioned a sword for presentation to Totten. Totaling 107 women, the group inscribed the sword with the phrase “When woman suffers, chivalry forbears; The soldier fears all danger but his own.” During the presentation ceremony, the presenters called for the officer “to let it rust in your scabbard, than draw it in the cause of injustice or oppression.” In his reply, Totten said “it shall be borne in defense of my country always, when right, and never in any land or against any people on the side of wrong, injustice, oppression, or their constitutional rights.” Upon receiving the sword, Totten and his men remained in camp at Fletcher’s Landing until transportation arrived on February 12.³²

With the crisis averted in Little Rock, attention in the state now turned to the public referendum for a secession convention. Sixty-three percent of the voters supported calling a convention but pro-unionist delegates received about 6,000 more votes than their pro-secession opponents. The convention met in Little Rock on March 4 and after more than two weeks of

³¹ Captain James Totten, correspondence with Colonel Samuel Cooper, February 9, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 645.

³² Ezell, “The Little Rock Crisis of 1861”; Ingrisano, *An Artilleryman’s War*, 49-50.

debate, the delegates approved another popular referendum on the topic to be held in August to allow the voters of the state a chance to approve a secession ordinance.³³

The situation in the state remained tense with focus now on Fort Smith. The military post held a large number of weapons to protect the western border from attack and calls to take the facility grew. Groups seized shipments of arms destined for the fort by stopping steamboats on the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. On the same day that Totten and his men departed Little Rock, two shipments of military goods were seized by armed men at Napoleon, Arkansas, where the Arkansas River emptied into the Mississippi. While it is unclear if these men operated as part of an organized militia unit, they did claim to be acting on behalf of the state. The goods, originally destined for a number of Federal posts along the Arkansas River, included horse tack and more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition.³⁴

With the firing upon Fort Sumter on April 12, President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion, including 780 men from Arkansas. After conflict finally broke out between the seceded states and the Federal government, Captain William Burns descended the Arkansas River from Fort Smith to gauge the popular sentiment in the state. Arriving in Little Rock on April 20, he tried to meet with Rector but the governor refused to speak with the officer. He observed groups of armed men in the capital organizing to capture

³³ James Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansas's Road to Secession* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 130; Ralph Wooster, "The Arkansas Secession Convention." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 13, (Summer 1954), 180, 182-83.

³⁴ Report of Major Justus McKinstry to Captain Seth West, February 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 646-47.

Fort Smith. Passing Pine Bluff, Burns encountered a steamboat tasked with transporting supplies to fort. The craft was under armed guard and the officer believed that the new captain of the vessel reported to Rector. Arms taken from the steamship were stored in houses across the town and preparations were under way to use the craft to transport volunteer troops up the Arkansas River to Fort Smith to help seize the installation. Understanding that the situation would likely only continue to deteriorate, Burns continued on to St. Louis to report his observations.³⁵

In light of the firing on Fort Sumter, the Federal government evacuated Forts Arbuckle, Washita, and Cobb in the Indian Territory on April 16. Texas militia took control of Fort Arbuckle the day after Federal forces departed, moving to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. The report of Burns notified officers in St. Louis of the threat to Fort Smith. On April 23, Federal troops abandoned Fort Smith, with most of the men traveling to Fort Leavenworth while some specialist troops marched overland to St. Louis as descending the Arkansas River was deemed to be too dangerous in light of recent events.³⁶

³⁵ Report of Captain William Burns to Colonel Joseph Taylor, April 21, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 647.

³⁶ Report of Lieutenant Colonel William Emory to Lieutenant Colonel E.D. Townsend, May 19, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 648-49.

The order to evacuate the fort on April 23 was not the first time Federal authorities moved to protect the troops stationed at the post. In the immediate aftermath of the seizure of the Little Rock Arsenal, commanders in Washington ordered the evacuation of Fort Smith. In



Modern Arsenal Building. The building on the far right is the Arkansas Arts Center. Photo by David Sesser.

response, citizens in Fort Smith decried the events in Little Rock, calling the situation at the arsenal the “consequence of the actions of a mob.” Composing a statement at a mass meeting held on February 22, the citizens of Fort Smith referenced the recently completed secession convention

vote, noting that “the late decision of the people at the ballot-box has proved beyond question the almost unanimous voice in the counties adjoining Fort Smith for Union as against violence, mob law, and secession.” This outcry led to the cancelation of the order to evacuate the post. With little support to seize the fort in the surrounding communities, volunteer troops from elsewhere in the state were required to make the movement.³⁷

³⁷ Correspondence of L. Thomas to Brigadier General William Harney, February 13, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 654; Correspondence of Fort Smith citizens to the Secretary of War, February 22, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 655; Correspondence of Major General Winfield Scott to Brigadier General William Harney, February 22, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 656.

With the abandonment of Fort Smith, armed civilians from across the state could easily capture the facility. When Federal troops evacuated the post, they removed as much equipment as possible but some military stores remained. The last troops departed from the fort at 9:00 pm and one hour later, two boats containing about three hundred militia and ten pieces of artillery arrived in Fort Smith. Under the command of militia Colonel Solon Borland, the troops quickly marched to the fort. Borland, a former physician and United States Senator, served as the major of the Arkansas regiment in the Mexican-American War. Rector placed him in command of the expedition to capture the fort, which succeeded in taking the facility but only few Federal soldiers fell into the hands of the militia. Major Richard Gatlin of the 5th United States Infantry became a prisoner of war on the orders of Rector but quickly received parole in exchange for promising to not take up arms against Arkansas or the other southern states until being properly exchanged. Gatlin resigned his commission a short time after the incident and served as a brigadier general in the Confederate army.³⁸

With the capture of Fort Smith, the majority of the volunteers returned home with only a few small groups remaining to garrison the former Federal posts. At Fort Smith, two militia companies from Sebastian County were joined by two from Crawford County in holding the

³⁸ Report of Major Samuel Sturgis, May 21, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 650-51; Report of Captain Alexander Montgomery, April 24, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 651; Orders of Captain Samuel Sturgis, April 22, 1861, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 652; Report of Major Richard Gatlin, *O.R.*, Series 1, Volume 1, 650; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 102-103; Ed Bearss and Arrell Gibson, *Fort Smith: Little Gibraltar on the Arkansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 241-43.

post. Following the firing upon Fort Sumter, calls grew to reconvene the secession convention before the popular vote. President of the convention, David Walker, finally acquiesced and the members reassembled in Little Rock on May 6. After voting down another motion to take the question before the voters, the convention voted to leave the Union with only Isaac Murphy of Madison County voting against the motion. The convention rewrote the state constitution and established a new standing army. Many of the men who served in the volunteer units during the arsenal crisis saw service in this new army or in the Confederate army. The new constitution directly impacted Rector. Viewed by both Unionists and pro-secession groups as being inept and dangerous, the new constitution changed the term of office for the governor from four-years to two-years. This reduction saw Rector's term end in the fall of 1862 when he was defeated in his reelection bid by Harris Flanagin of Arkadelphia.³⁹

James Totten served in the Federal army during the war, reaching the rank of brevet brigadier general by the end of the conflict and continued his service as a lieutenant colonel after the fighting ceased. The Little Rock Arsenal Crisis and related events brought the threat of war to Arkansas months before the actual outbreak of violence in the spring of 1861. The militia and volunteer units involved in the events helped bring the state to the brink of war. Only through the surrender of the Federal facilities was the threat of war avoided and Little Rock avoided being known as the place where the Civil War began.

³⁹ Bearss, *Fort Smith*, 243; Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment*, 157-62; Dougan, *Confederate Arkansas*, 94-95.

Featured Artifact: Thompson Submachine Gun, Model of 1928A1

By LTC Matthew W. Anderson



Figure 1: M1928A1(C) SN: A.O.151326X on display at the Arkansas National Guard Museum

What many people may not know about the iconic Thompson Submachine Gun is that it was the result of a failed attempt to create an Auto Rifle. Lt Col. John T. Thompson while serving as Chief of Ordnance for the Cuban Campaign where he gained a reputation for his logistical organizational abilities, safely transporting 18,000 tons of munitions from Tampa, FL to the battlefields in Cuba without incident. During this campaign he met Lt. John H. Parker who convinced him to acquire 15 gatling guns so Lt. Parker could form a Gatling Gun unit. After the Cuban campaign, Col. Thompson was assigned as Chief, Small Arms Division, and Ordnance Department. As Chief of Small Arms, he supervised the development of the M1903 Springfield Rifle and the development of the .45 ACP. He also chaired the board that approved the adoption of the M1911 pistol. In this position he also advocated for the development of an Auto Rifle from his experiences in the Cuban Campaign but met some resistance as some considered automatic rifles somewhat wasteful.

In 1914, Col. John Thompson retired from the Army and went to work as Chief Engineer for Remington Arms Company and supervised the construction of the Eddystone Arsenal, Chester, PA. In his spare time he continued to conduct research into the development of an Auto Rifle. While researching patents that could help solve problems with locking or delaying the opening of the breech, he came across the design by Commander John Blish, U.S. Navy who developed the Blish Lock based off of the Blish Principle. The Blish Principle believed that metals had a greater tendency to adhere to each other when high pressure is rapidly applied. This was based on observations he made from breeches that would come open or unscrewed under low pressure firing charges but would remained closed and locked under high pressure firing charges on naval guns. Commander Blish took this theory and developed the Blish Lock that was essentially a wedge that delayed the opening of breech until pressures dropped to a safe level.

John Thompson was excited to find this patent and believed it would solve the problem of premature opening and unsafe chamber pressures in a blowback firearm design. Further it did not require a complex locking mechanism. In 1915, John Thompson contacted John Blish about the design and worked out an agreement to use his design in exchange for shares in a company he formed soon after. In 1916, the Auto Ordnance Corporation was formed with financial backing from Thomas Ryan, a tycoon in the tobacco industry. The first two employees were Chief Engineer Theodore Eickhoff and Assistant George Goll. In 1917, several prototypes were designed and tested using the Blish Lock and Blowback design with rifle ammunition. Tests found that it would fire several rounds and then jam up, damaging the Blish Lock and

not extracting cartridges properly. Lubricating the cartridges helped but this was an unacceptable solution. Eickhoff then tested the design with .45 ACP round and found it to work reliably. Since the intent was to design an Auto Rifle, Eickhoff did not look forward to telling the bad news to John Thompson. When he heard the news John Thompson replied, "Very well, we shall put aside the auto rifle for now and instead build a little machine gun. A one man hand held machine gun. A trench broom!"



Figure 2: (Internal parts of a M1928A1. Parts remained basically unchanged in design from the Model 1919 through M1928A1. Parts shown are the U-Shaped Oiler, Buffers, Guide Rod, Spring, Lower Bolt, Upper Bolt with Charging Handle and Bronze Blish Lock, The Blish Lock slides up and down at an angle in the Lower Bolt section, grooves inside the receiver also guide the Blish Lock up and down as the bolt is blown back) – Private Collection

With the Great War in its third year, trench warfare tactics were developed to counter the advances in artillery and heavy machine guns giving the advantage to the defenders. Even the lightest machine guns of the time, the Lewis Gun and the Chauchat, while mobile, were still somewhat cumbersome and in short supply leaving most of the fight upon reaching the enemy trench to bolt action rifles, bayonets, grenades and clubs. Having a short range repeating arm, firing pistol cartridges were an ideal close quarters offensive weapon for trench clearing.

Work on the new concept began immediately. By the summer of 1918, a design was finalized with a few minor changes made for durability and construction. Prototypes were made and designated Annihilator I. The first shipment was packaged and shipped for overseas delivery, arriving in New York City port on 11 November 1918, Armistice Day. Now that the war was over, there was no need for a trench clearing weapon. With shareholders and much invested in the company, they needed to find a new market. In 1919, Auto Ordnance Corporation began to redesign the weapon for civilian use. The board discussed how to classify the gun and what to name it going forward. Eventually, they approved the name Thompson Submachine Gun.

In 1920, John Thompson demonstrated the Model 1919 Thompson Submachine Gun at the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio. This was done in hopes of still securing an Army or Navy contract as well as



Figure 3: (John Thompson demonstrates the Model 1919 Thompson SMG at Camp Perry, OH in 1920) - Wikipedia

to make the broader public aware of this unique firearm. Firing 1,500 rpm from a 100 round drum, from a weapon smaller than a rifle made quite an impression.

Auto Ordnance Corporation made further changes to the Thompson SMG by adding a detachable wooden stock so that the shooter could better utilize the Lyman adjustable sight. These design changes were incorporated into the Model of 1921. Auto Ordnance then contracted with Colt's Patent Fire Arms Company of Hartford, Connecticut to begin production. Starting in March 1921, 15,000 Model of 1921s were produced. These were sold to civilians for \$175 to \$200 and soon became notoriously popular with gangsters during the prohibition era, despite Auto Ordnance Corporations attempts to prevent sales to criminals. It was during this time that the Thompson SMG acquired the nicknames "Chopper, Gat, Chicago Typewriter, and the Tommy Gun." Movies further amplified the impression that every gangster had one to

even a greater degree. In actuality, criminals were paying \$1,000 to \$2,000 on the black market to acquire one. During the prohibition era the Coast Guard purchased a number of Thompson SMGs to use on patrol boats for boarding parties of rum runners.

By 1925 only 3,000 had been sold. With sales lagging, and the need to revive interest in the Thompson SMG, Auto Ordnance created a semi-auto version in 1927 by converting some of their stock of Model of 1921s and re-designating them Model of 1927. The words "Submachine Gun" were milled off and over stamped with "Semi-Automatic Carbine."

From 1926 to 1928, the US Marines purchased 671 Model of 1921s. Initially these were used to protect the US Mail after several violent hijackings. The hijackings quickly ended and the Marines later used their Model of 1921s in action in Nicaragua and China. In 1928, the Navy contracted Auto Ordnance for a supply of Thompson SMGs but wanted the cyclic rate of fire lowered from 800 to 600 rounds per minute. Auto Ordnance again used existing stock of Model of 1921s and modified the internals to slow the rate of fire. They also changed to a horizontal fore grip. These were marked "U.S. Navy and the "1" in Model of 1921 was over stamped with an "8." While a few were acquired by the Navy, many more Navy marked Model of 1928s were sold to police departments and to foreign governments. In 1930, the Marine Corps officially adopted the Thompson SMG due to its success in combat. In 1932, the US Army also acquired a few Navy Models for limited procurement for use in armored vehicles in the Cavalry.



Figure 4: (Marine during the Banana Wars in Nicaragua, 1930's) - Marine Corps Archives

With the stock market crash of 1929 and the great depression that followed, the 15,000 Thompsons made by Colt for Auto Ordnance lasted for 20 years. Auto-Ordnance was eventually sold to Russell Maguire in the late 1930s. With war breaking out in Europe, France contracted for 3,000 on November 1, 1939, which used up the remaining Thompsons in stock. The British soon followed with orders. Russell Maguire approached Colt to produce another run of M1928 Thompson SMGs. Colt was already committed to other military contracts and turned him down. He next turned to Savage Arms Corporation of Utica, NY who agreed in 1939 to begin production. Part of the agreement included that Savage Arms would not place their name on the weapon. Weapons were stamped "Auto-Ordnance Corporation. New York, N.Y. U.S.A." on the right side of the receiver serial numbers were prefixed with the letter "S" for Savage. After initial retooling and production sample testing, Savage Arms began to fill contracts. The French requested an additional 3,000 in March 1940. Followed again by the British. The British purchased 108,000 Savage Arms built M1928 TSMG for \$175.00 each with parts and accessories. These were pre-Lend Lease Act so no US markings were on them. France was not able to take delivery before they surrendered to Germany.



Figure 5: British Soldier training with the new M1928 TSMG in England, 1940 - IWM

With the signing of the Lend Lease Act in March 1941, the demand from Allied nations quickly outpaced production capacity, resulting in Auto Ordnance opening a factory in 1941 in Bridgeport, CT. Minor changes were made and designated M1928A1 TSMG. The most noticeable change was from the vertical wooden fore grip to a horizontal wooden fore grip. Also, all Savage and Auto Ordnance built weapons were stamped Auto-Ordnance Corporation Bridgeport Connecticut. U.S.A." to reflect the new address. Coordination was made for 100% parts interchangeability between Savage

and Auto-Ordnance. The first M1928A1s to be produced at the Bridgeport plant were in August 1941. Auto Ordnance prefixed their serial numbers with "A.O." Serial numbers can be found on the left side of the receiver and matching serial number on the bottom of the trigger housing normally covered when the stock is installed. Lend Lease weapons were marked as US Property since they were contracted by the US Government and lend/leased to Allied nations. US Ordnance Department would also contracted

M1928A1s for the US military. Initial cost per weapon was \$202.50. This cost was gradually reduced with each successive contract.

Around serial number S. 400,000 and A.O. 80,000, Auto Ordnance simplified the design of the M1928A1 by replacing the complex Lyman adjustable rear sight with a fixed sight formed in the shape of an "L." This change took place in February 1942 at the request of the Ordnance Department who determined that a simpler more ruggedized sight with a larger sighting aperture was needed. The .125 sight aperture was ranged at 100 yards and the notch at the top for 250 yards. This sight was also be used later on the M1 TSMG.



Figure 6: Complex Lyman Adjustable Rear Sight would be deemed unnecessary and replaced with an L type fixed sight to reduce cost and speed production) - Private Collection

To further simplify and speed up production the complex finned barrel was examined by the Ordnance Department. It was determined to be unnecessary since the open bolt design permitted cooling. Around serial number S. 500,000 and A.O. 85,000 the finned barrel was superseded by the smooth tapered barrel. During this time checkering of various parts began to be eliminated.



Figure 7: (Finned barrel with Cutts Compensator and horizontal fore grip as found on Lend Lease and early wartime production M1928A1 TSMG) – Private Collection

Further redesign and simplification continued on the TSMG when Savage Arms proposed to the Ordnance Department in February 1942 a series of improvements that eliminated the complicated three piece Blish

Lock bolt design for a single piece bolt design. The Ordnance Department adopted the new design in April 1942 as the Submachine Gun, Cal. .45, M1. The M1 TSMG also saw the Cutts compensator removed, provisions for the drum magazine removed and the charging handle moved to the right side. The M1928A1 was then classified Limited Standard on 25 April 1942. The last M1928A1 TSMG was manufactured on 15 October 1942 at a cost of \$70.00 per weapon. The total for all M1928 and M1928A1s manufactured from 1940 to 1942 was 1,070,832 (Auto Ordnance – 323,900 and Savage Arms – 746,932). Thereafter all TSMG manufacturing was the M1 with the first being delivered in July 1942. A final design change was accepted by the Ordnance Department on 29 October 1942, when Savage Arms presented a bolt design which eliminated the hammer, spring and firing pin by machining the firing pin head directly into the face of the bolt. The design was designated Submachine Gun, Cal. .45, M1A1.



Figure 8: (M1 TSMG – Note stock is not removable, simplified rear L sight, charging handle on right side, no Cutts compensator) – Private collection



Figure 9: M1 TSMG Bolt, Spring, Guide Rod and Buffer. Note bolt handle is now on the side. This bolt would be further simplified by removing the floating spring and firing pin and machining a fixed firing pin head to the face of the bolt in the M1A1 – Private Collection

While these changes simplified production, the TSMG was still heavy compared to a new Submachine gun that the Ordnance Department was developing that was designated the M3. The Ordnance Department notified Auto Ordnance to conclude production with the last contracted M1A1 being produced on 15 February 1944, at a final cost of \$43. In all, 714,355 (Savage Arms – 464,800, Auto Ordnance – 249,555) M1 and M1A1s were delivered. On 16 March 1944, the Ordnance Committee officially designated the M1928 and M1928A1 obsolete. The M1 and M1A1 would both continue to serve in limited standard through the end of WWII and to a limited degree in Korea and Vietnam.

The M1928A1 Thompson SMG on display at the museum is Serial No. A.O. 151326X. Note that the U.S. has been ground off, the A1 changed to AC and an "X" has been placed after the serial number. This has been found to be on several M1928A1s in the A.O. 150,000 to 152,000 range with some occasionally falling outside this range. These were likely TSMGs bought back by Auto Ordnance during or after the war, refurbished and sold to law enforcement agencies. Originally, M1928A1s were manufactured with horizontal wooden fore grips, so these were also replaced with the early wooden vertical grip.



Figure 10: Note C overstamp on 1 in A1, the X was added to the serial number and U.S. was removed when pulled to fill state law enforcement contract



Figure 11: Note the detachable stock. Also note simplified rear L type sight, smooth tapered barrel without fins indicating the measures taken to simplify production. It is likely that the forward grips were spares that law enforcement possibly requested be added since they are not consistent with late production M1928A1s

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PHOTO FROM THE ARCHIVES



African American football team, Camp Pike, WWI

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