



## THIS MONTH in MILITARY HISTORY

- 1799 George Washington passes away at Mount Vernon at 64.
- 1860 South Carolina secedes from the Union.
- 1864 Sherman captures the city of Savannah, Georgia during his March to the Sea.
- 1903 The Orville Brothers first take flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.
- 1941 Civilian Air Patrol is established.
- 1950 Pyongyang is seized by the Chinese army.
- 1959 The first all-U.S. built ballistic missile, the *Thor* missile, is launched at Cape Canaveral.
- 1972 Apollo 17, the last NASA lunar mission, launches.
- 1989 American forces arrive in Panama as Operation *JUST CAUSE* begins.
- 1992 U.S. Marines land in Somalia during the country's civil war.

## TRIVIA

- 1 What was the name of the doctrine that enabled a president to use atomic force as a means of deterrence during the Cold War?
- 2 What was the name of the military operation in 1998 that included air strikes on Baghdad?
- 3 What was the name of the world's first test of the Hydrogen (or "H") Bomb?

### ANSWERS FOR NOVEMBER 2020 QUESTIONS

- 1 What military operation, announced in 2010, superseded *IRAQI FREEDOM*?  
➤ **NEW DAWN**
- 2 Which two Rock Island Arsenal commanders are buried at the Rock Island National Cemetery?  
➤ **D. M. King & T. J. Rodman**
- 3 What was the name of the Panamanian dictator that prompted the U.S. response known as *JUST CAUSE* in 1989?  
➤ **Manuel Noriega**



Savanna Army Depot as it appeared in 1997. Note the individual ammo bunkers. Today part of the site is used as an industrial and commerce park, while other locations are under protection of the USFWS and NPS. Most of the original facilities are either in disrepair or have been destroyed.



For answers to trivia, information on this month's artifact spotlight, digital copies of old newsletters and more, visit the ASC History Office website at:

<https://aschq.army.mil/About-Us/History>

## Harpers Ferry

In 1794 Harpers Ferry was selected by George Washington for the site of the second National Armory. In 1796, the government purchased land next to the convergence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers from the heirs of Robert Harper. Construction of the "United States Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry" began in 1799. Three years later full-scale production of arms commenced. Muskets, rifles and, after 1805, pistols were all manufactured here. The armory served its purpose well over the years providing weapons for the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the War of 1812, implementing interchangeable parts, and producing the modern rifled musket. In early 1861 the superintendent of the arsenal deserted to join the Virginia secession convention. On 17 April CPT Charles P. Kingsbury was assigned as acting superintendent with support of some twenty soldiers. His assignment lasted less than 48 hours.

On the morning of 18 April, the day after Virginia voted to secede, word was received that three trains of Confederate troops were on their way from Richmond for the supposed confiscation of weapons and destruction of Harpers Ferry. Over 14,000 weapons were on the grounds of the armory. In order to deny the weapons and facilities, Kingsbury and his Soldiers began work to destroy the arsenal. CPT Kingsbury ordered barrels of gun powder be wrapped in the Soldiers bedding and covertly taken to where the weapons were stored. Flammable material was placed on top of the powder, and then the men waited. Between 9 and 10pm that night, word was received that 2,000 men were marching on the arsenal. CPT

Kingsbury gave the order: the match was lit, and the arsenal went up in smoke. The explosions and ensuing fire did its job. At most a thousand firearms fell into the hands of the rebels. Unfortunately, the gunpowder did not explode in the production buildings and much equipment was salvaged. Two weeks later the Confederates moved the rifle production machinery was to Richmond and the remaining buildings were destroyed.

Congress immediately understood the need for a series of new arsenals out of the reach of the Confederate forces, including one to supply the Army on the frontier. In 1862 they authorized the establishment of Rock Island Arsenal. Upon creation of RIA, a team of officers went to Rock Island to survey the land and recommend the layout of the new facility. One of the officers assigned to this duty was Kingsbury, now promoted to Major. In early 1863 MAJ Kingsbury was appointed as the first Commander of RIA and he commenced construction of the Clock tower building near the western tip of the island. In 1865 Kingsbury began writing the Chief of Ordnance recommending Rock Island Arsenal be developed to serve as a National Arsenal and foundry to replace the production lost at Harpers Ferry. This was approved. MAJ Kingsbury was reassigned prior to completion of even the first permanent building, his presence created a link between the loss of Harpers Ferry and the start of an even grander production facility at RIA. Brevet Brigadier General Rodman would replace him and finish the design of the new Arsenal where it sits today.

## Savanna Proving Ground

The Savanna Proving Ground was the oldest depot in the Industrial Operations Command. Savanna was constructed in northern Illinois as a sub-post of Rock Island Arsenal in 1918. Its original mission was to proof and test artillery and ammunition. In 1921, Savanna Proving Ground became independent of Rock Island Arsenal and was reorganized as Savanna Ordnance Depot. When the mission changed to mostly storage in 1962, the depot was renamed as Savanna Army Depot Activity (SVADA).

Throughout World War II, SVADA was responsible for storage, processing, and handling munitions, explosives, and industrial chemicals. The Defense Ammunition Center and School and the U.S. Army Technical Center for Explosive Safety were also housed there. After the war, heavy manufacturing slowed and many areas were used for demolishing and burning outdated ordnance. SVADA was one site set as a BRAC closure in July 1995. It was officially closed in March 2000, and most munitions were sent to

McAlester Army Ammunition Plant in Oklahoma. The Defense Ammunition Center and Technical Center for Explosive Safety were also realigned to McAlester.

The Savanna area tried to offset negative economic impacts by competing to be the site for a proposed medium security prison. They were top contenders for proposed sites three different times between 1995 and 1998 and were finally chosen in 1998. Opposition grew steadily with each attempt to bring in a prison facility, and Governor Jim Edgar bent to environmentalists, deciding that the prison would be built in Thomson, IL instead.

Because of its mission testing artillery and storing chemical weapons, federal and state EPA agencies have been working to remove items like unexploded ordnance and chemical residue that remain on the grounds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services will take over about 9,404 acres after the cleanup is complete and utilize the area as a refuge for many threatened or endangered animals.

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Presented to you by your friendly ASC History Office. Feel free to call or stop by our office for any of your history needs.

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