



THIS MONTH in MILITARY HISTORY

The Bridges at Rock Island

- 1898 12 Spain severs diplomatic relations with the United States.
- 1917 9 The U.S. Congress approves the declaration of war against Germany.
- 1942 18 The Doolittle Raid is conducted on targets across Honshu with B-25 bombers.
- 1945 1 The largest amphibious landing in the Pacific Theater takes place on Okinawa.
- 1947 20 The last formal surrender of World War II occurs on the island of Peleliu.
- 1962 30 The *Oxcart* makes its first flight at Groom Lake.
- 1964 5 GEN Douglas MacArthur passes away at Walter Reed Hospital.
- 1970 11 The Apollo 13 mission blasts off from Kennedy Space Center.
- 1982 3 The Falkland Islands War begins with an Argentinian amphibious assault.
- 2003 6 Baghdad is taken by a U.S. led coalition force after three weeks.

TRIVIA

- 1 What famous lawyer assisted in the defense of the railroad companies after the Effie Afton crash?
- 2 Who was the Army Officer that surveyed the Rock Island Rapids in 1837?
- 3 What was one of the reasons for the train deck being on the top of the 1872 bridge?

ANSWERS FOR MARCH 2022 QUESTIONS

- 1 What two future American Presidents served in the Black Hawk War?
➤ **Presidents Zachary Taylor and Abraham Lincoln**
- 2 What was the largest percentage of the U.S. Army to be based or supported by Ft. Armstrong?
➤ **20% of the Army**
- 3 How did Ft. Armstrong and frontier installations subsist with the incredibly long supply lines?
➤ **Through "sutlers" essentially contractors who supported the Soldiers in austere locations.**



Grey Countries that have not declared war on birds
Pink Countries that HAVE declared war on birds, and have lost

Fact can sometimes be stranger than fiction. We all know about the devil spawn birds known as Geese, but an Emu can be just as bad. In the 1930s, Australia mounted a military action against the birds ... and lost. 30 years later, China mounted a military operation against Sparrows ... and lost. The moral of the story here is don't fight the birds. They can fly and they will beat you.



Trivia answers, digital newsletters, and more history is available on the ASC History website:

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

The story of the bridges across Rock Island Arsenal could easily fill several chapters. It is a tale that serves as a staple in the history of the island and American westward expansion. West met East on 21 April 1856 as the first trains crossed the Mississippi River between Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa. Shortly after the bridge opened, the steamboat Effie Afton crashed into the draw span of the bridge. The collision resulted in total loss of the boat itself and also destroyed the draw span. The subsequent court case that followed resulted in a landmark verdict that allowed traffic over waterways, with water traffic having priority. The bridge was repaired and kept in use until 1865, when it was rebuilt using heavier timber.

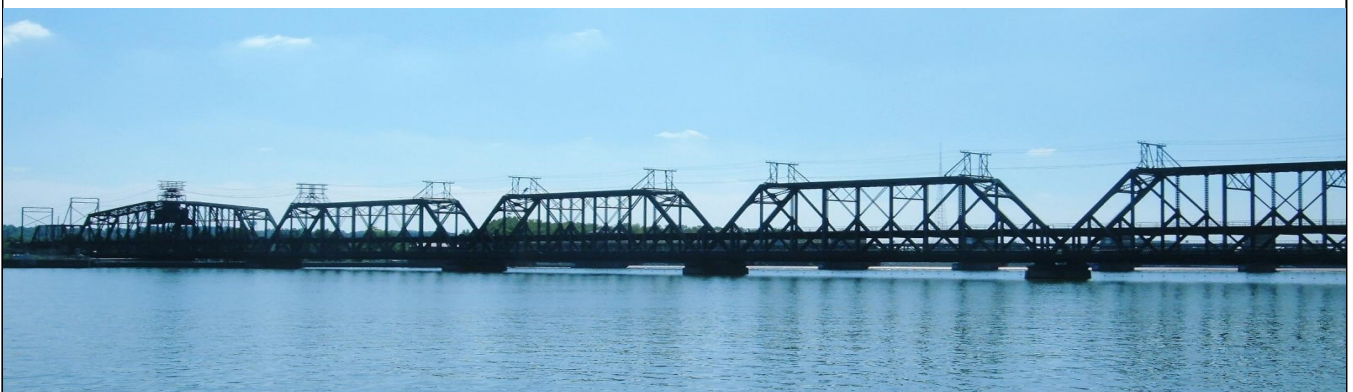
By 1866, however, with the approval of the new national arsenal at Rock Island, it was decided that the bridge be moved by 1872 to its current location. Initially, the bridge was to be a double track bridge with an extra deck for wagons. However, estimated costs for such a bridge exceeded congressional appropriations. COL Thomas J. Rodman carried on a lengthy correspondence with the Chief of Ordnance and the Secretary of War seeking the additional funds necessary to build the bridge. Unfortunately, his persistence led to the transfer of the bridge construction to the Engineering Department. Major Daniel Flagler, his successor, stated: "General Rodman was deeply interested, and took great pride in his work, and its (bridge construction) transfer to other offices was a serious blow to him."



The 1872 iron bridge measured slightly over 1,500 feet in length. The bridge had five spans 220 to 260 feet long, plus a draw span of 368 feet in length. The superstructure of the bridge was a double Whipple truss with two decks. Considering it was constructed for two-way traffic, the width of the bridge was a narrow sixteen feet. The bridge was finally completed and turned over to the Rock Island Arsenal in 1873. By the 1890s, however, locomotives and rail cars had become too large and heavy for the old 1872 iron bridge and a replacement was needed.

The current bridge was designed by Ralph Modjeski and completed in 1896, replacing the iron bridge. Utilizing the same piers as its predecessor, the new Pratt/Baltimore truss bridge was designed with a redundant steel frame. It was constructed by the Phoenix Bridge Company under contract to the U.S. Army. The new bridge is an engineering marvel and built to last. It has stood 126 years without any major modification to the original design. Rail traffic volume was increased by adding a second rail line on the top span. Additionally, the swing span can rotate 360-degrees to accommodate river traffic. The swing span is so well balanced that, on a windy day, the span will spin without using the drive motor. The design was later updated to include streetcar tracks on the lower deck.

The 1896 bridge was Ralph Modjeski's first bridge design, and he went on to design at least seventeen other bridges. The most notable is the San Francisco Bay Bridge. Modjeski also designed the old I-74 "Bettendorf Veterans Memorial Bridge" that was completed in 1933.



1. History Office, Army Sustainment Command. *An Illustrated History of the Rock Island Arsenal and Arsenal Island*. Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. 2010. pp20-44.4.

History is being made every day at this command.

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