

#### THE ASC HISTORY NEWSLETTER Volume 12 Issue 10 SE July 2022

**COMMEMORATING ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL'S 160TH ANNIVERSARY** 



di,

A R.R. dtoLe





### JULY METARY HISTORY

- 1823 № U.S. Navy forces successfully launch a raid on a pirate base on Cape Cruz, Cuba.
- 1863 → The Battle of Gettysburg unfolds, halting Lee's invasion of the North.
- 1942  $\underline{\omega}$  *WATCHTOWER* is conducted in preparation for the first American Offensive in WWII.
- 1944 GEN Patton arrives in France to take command of the Third Army.
- 1945 ज GEN MacArthur announces the liberation of the Philippines.
- 1945 ਰੋ The Trinity Test is conducted in the Alamogordo Desert, New Mexico.
- 1945 No. USS *Indianapolis* completes her top-secret mission of atomic delivery.
- 1947 The AK-47 goes into production for the first time in the Soviet Union.
- 1950 ज The first clash between the U.S. and North Korean forces takes place at Osan.
- 1997 Note the 200-year-old USS Constitution sets sail for the first time in 116 years.

# MONTI-ILY TRIVIA

- 1 How much money did the Army pay the Davenport family for the remaining 150 acres of privately owned land on RIA?
- **2** Where did the first stone come from to build the Arsenal?
- **3** What paper took a vested interest in the construction of RIA and the Prison barracks, for good and bad?

#### ANSWERS FOR JUNE 2022 QUESTIONS

- 1 When did the last Confederate prisoners leave the Rock Island Prison Barracks?
  - The last prisoners were released from the hospital in July 1865.
- 2 What unfortunate order did the first commander at Rock Island Arsenal have to carry out just prior to taking command?
  - MAJ Kingsbury ordered the burning of the Harper's Ferry Armory to prevent its capture on 18 April 1861.
- 3 When did the last building built as a part of the Prison Barracks get torn down?
  - The last building from the RIA Prison hospital was slated to be replaced in 1907.

# European nations in 1913

## The Birth of a Grand National Arsenal

The history of the U.S. Government at Rock Island reaches back farther than 200 years and has many paradigm shifting events throughout. However, perhaps the single most important event occurred not at Rock Island, but in Washington D.C. on 12 JUL 1862. On this day, Congress established three new arsenals at Columbus, Indianapolis, and Rock Island. Thus, the birthday of the installation that we see today does not happen until almost 50 years after the first boot is on the ground.

The prospect of an arsenal at Rock Island was not a new one in 1862. In fact, one would have to go back to the days of the armory at the abandoned Fort Armstrong in 1845 to find the origins. However, perhaps the most significant recommendation for a national arsenal comes from the Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup in 1852. Jesup stated that Rock Island "[was] one of the most valuable in our western country" and that the confluence of rail, foot, and river traffic underscored its strategic importance. <sup>1</sup> Sale of the island was a hotbutton issue in the surrounding community. No fewer than three times did the site come up for auction, and each time it was removed within 24 hours of bidding.

Although by 1863, both the Quartermaster and Ordnance Corps would be present on the island, the War Department saw Rock Island as a small installation in the grander scheme of the Army's industrial power and depot system. The 1862 establishment of the arsenal originally called for Rock Island's purpose to be a small footprint that was "designed for deposit and repair." The allocation for construction and furnishing was \$100,000. Shortly after the land was designated a site for the arsenal, a series of inspections and surveys was carried out to determine suitability and general topography, and plan where the buildings would be constructed. However, it is the first survey by GEN C.P. Buckingham that may have stood out to the War Department the most. Buckingham reported that the island was "without a doubt, the best place for an



arsenal."<sup>2</sup> A board of officers selected the west end of the island to construct the arsenal's first building, "Storehouse A" (pictured left) in October of 1862. However, shortly after construction began, additional surveying of not only the island, but of the Army's industrial and strategic footprint began to sway Washington towards making Rock Island a much more ambitious project. GEN George D. Ramsey wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in February of 1864 and stated that "after careful study there is no position which [...] presents so few objections as Rock Island." Ramsey went on to describe the natural security afforded by its location,

ease of transportation, and wealth of available resources.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis from Rock Island was slowly shifting from a small arsenal to a grand national arsenal that not only repaired, but also manufactured and supported, materiel.

MAJ C.P. Kingsbury took command of the arsenal as the first commander in August of 1863. Kingsbury oversaw much of the construction of Storehouse A, but quickly moved onward in the Ordnance Department. It wasn't until LTC Thomas J. Rodman (pictured right) arrives at Rock Island in July of 1865 that the vision of this grand national arsenal was formed. Rodman supervised the completion of Storehouse A with some additional modifications to its original design, making the tower larger and the



clock faces bigger. He subsequently planned for a national arsenal consisting of twenty stone shops (inside of one shown at left), ancillary buildings, and an officer's row of quarters.



The first commanding officers at Rock Island suffered from no shortage



A difficult topic to broach for historians is finding the singular cause of World War I. Treaties with signatories married to other treaties with other signatories and mutual defense pacts are the simplest way to put it, but in fact, it's very much like trying to uncover a long mystery with yarn and photos on the wall. Needless to say...everyone was holding a loaded gun.



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

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

of problems and issues during its construction. Poor supply of limestone from LeClaire, lowa led to the contract being rerouted to a quarry in Joliet, Illinois. After the Chicago fire and a series of disputes with labor, the Joliet quarry also began to impose limitations of supply to the arsenal, to the point that armed guards were sent to ensure the government received its owed materials. Ice flows on the river created difficulties for bridge

maintenance and construction. In addition, fires consumed a few buildings, including the power plant near the turn of the century. Of the proposed twenty shops, thirteen were built. Twelve of these shops make up the core of Rock Island Arsenal today.

160 years later, the Rock Island Arsenal continues to contribute to the organic industrial base of the U.S. Army. It also provides materiel and personnel readiness for the Warfighter anywhere in the world, truly owing to its original mission of a "grand national arsenal." The arsenal has stood the test of seven major wars and supported numerous operations. To borrow from many old tales of the arsenal where one asks "how it fares", the answer one can give confidently is that the Rock Island Arsenal is ready for another 160 years and beyond.

- 1. MAJ Flagler, Daniel W. A History of the Rock Island Arsenal From Its Establishment in 1863 To December, 1876; Of the Island of Rock Island, The Site of the Arsenal, From 1804 to 1863. GPO, Washington, D.C. 1877. p36.
- 2. Nothstein, Ira O. "Rock Island Arsenal, Its History and Development." National Archives and the Works Progress Administration Project. Unpublished. 1937. p79.
- 3. Flagler, 1877. p38.

```
History is being made every day at this command.
```



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

Kevin Braafladt Command Historian Mark Struve Assistant Historian kevin.d.braafladt.civ@army.mil mark.j.struve.civ@army.mil

