



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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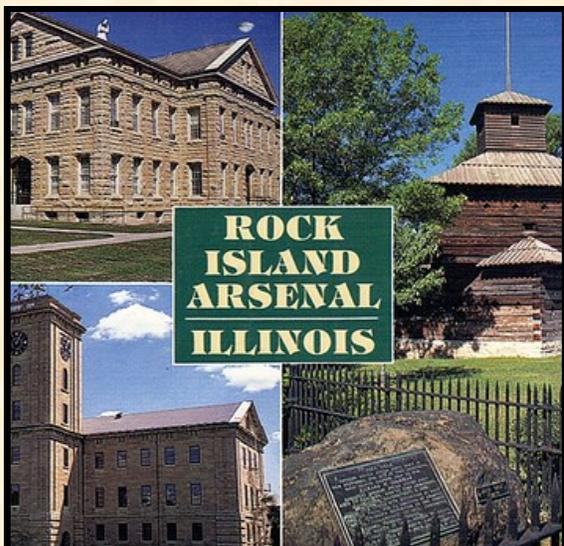
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## Dress Rehearsal for War (1774)

The road to the American Revolution began after the Seven Years' War (French & Indian War) between Britain and France. With the Treaty of Paris (1763), Britain acquired all French territory in North America south of Canada to the Mississippi River, with the exception of New Orleans. In order to minimize the cost of defending the vast territory, Britain issued the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade colonial settlement west of the Appalachians and signaled Britain's intent to have the colonists pay for a larger share of their own defense. Britain then attempted to establish a revenue stream with a series of logical, though sometimes poorly thought out, declarations. The Sugar Act (1764) lowered the tax on molasses but stepped up enforcement to stop New England smugglers, which threatened wealthy men like John Hancock. The Stamp Act (1765) placed a tax on official documents, a definition stretched to include newspapers, threatening freedom of the press. The Declaratory Act (1766) repealed the Stamp Act but unnecessarily threatened future taxes. The Townshend Duties (1767) then placed further restrictions on imports (including tea), broadened the rights of authorities to search and seize property, placed local authorities under direct British control, created a Board of Customs and Admiralty Court to deal with violators, and suspended the New York Provincial Assembly.

Despite these issues, the American Revolution might have been avoided but for the British decision to increase the number of troops in Boston in October 1768. What was meant to quell unrest backfired, further raising the alarm among colonists and deepening a series of widespread boycotts which lasted through 1771. During this time, tensions caused by the heightened military presence led to the Boston Massacre (1770), a serious escalation. Britain blinked first and repealed many of the Townshend Acts, but Parliament's replacement Tea Act (1773) led to further protests, including the Boston Tea Party. Frustrated, the British Parliament responded forcefully with the Intolerable Acts (1774), which closed the Port of Boston, shut down the Massachusetts Government, moved trials of royal officials to Britain, and quartered troops in colonial homes, and gave valuable border territory to Quebec. The protests expanded further. Boston, in particular, was now a powder keg. The only thing missing was the powder.

In May 1774, General Thomas Gage became military governor of Massachusetts and had the unenviable task of enforcing the Intolerable Acts. His plan to avoid war included removing arms and ammunition from the dozens of small arsenals and storehouses throughout New England. In August 1774, militia leader William Brattle informed Gage that his storehouse north of Boston at Winter Hill now contained nothing but Royal powder, since the local municipalities had removed their portions. Gage subsequently ordered Middlesex County sheriff David Phips to seize and relocate the Royal powder. On September 1st, 260 British soldiers arrived at the Powder House and removed its contents to Boston, along with two field cannon taken from nearby Cambridge. This led to what became known as the Powder Alarm. Colonial militia throughout New England, hearing of the removal, along with false rumors that the British had killed colonial militia and laid siege to Boston, took up arms to fight a war they believed had begun. Thousands of volunteers descended on Cambridge, forcing Loyalist officials there to flee to Boston. The truth soon doused the immediate fire, but the damage had been done. Gage retrenched in Boston and called for reinforcements, while militia leaders made plans to be more prepared in the event of war. In particular, they secured colonial war supplies, developed a system for organizing and training units of Minutemen to act on a moment's notice, and established a network of couriers ready to carry word of British troop movements throughout the region. Collectively, these preparations came into play seven months later, when the war began in earnest at Lexington and Concord. ~ Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson, JMC Archivist



### From the Archives

Rock Island Arsenal has an active history stretching back more than two hundred years. We can schedule historical tours for your group or office for either Quarters One or Rock Island Arsenal (driving, 45min; walking, 90min). Each tour is eligible for 1 CLP, with supervisor approval. If you are interested in a group tour, contact the JMC Research Library for scheduling: x20060.

### This Month in Military History

- October 3, 1990: Reunification of East and West Germany.
- October 10, 1845: The Naval School (U.S. Naval Academy) opens at Annapolis, Maryland.
- October 17, 539 BCE: King Cyrus of Persia takes Babylon and frees the Jews from the 70-year period of exile known as the Babylonian Captivity.
- October 24, 1596: Ottoman Empire defeats Austro-Hungarian forces at the Battle of Keresztes (Hungary).
- October 31, 802: Byzantine Empress Irene is driven out of Constantinople, soon to die in exile on Lesbos.

Do you have historical items? If so, please contact the Archivist: Room 661  
Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson - x20060 - paul.t.ferguson14.civ@mail.mil.