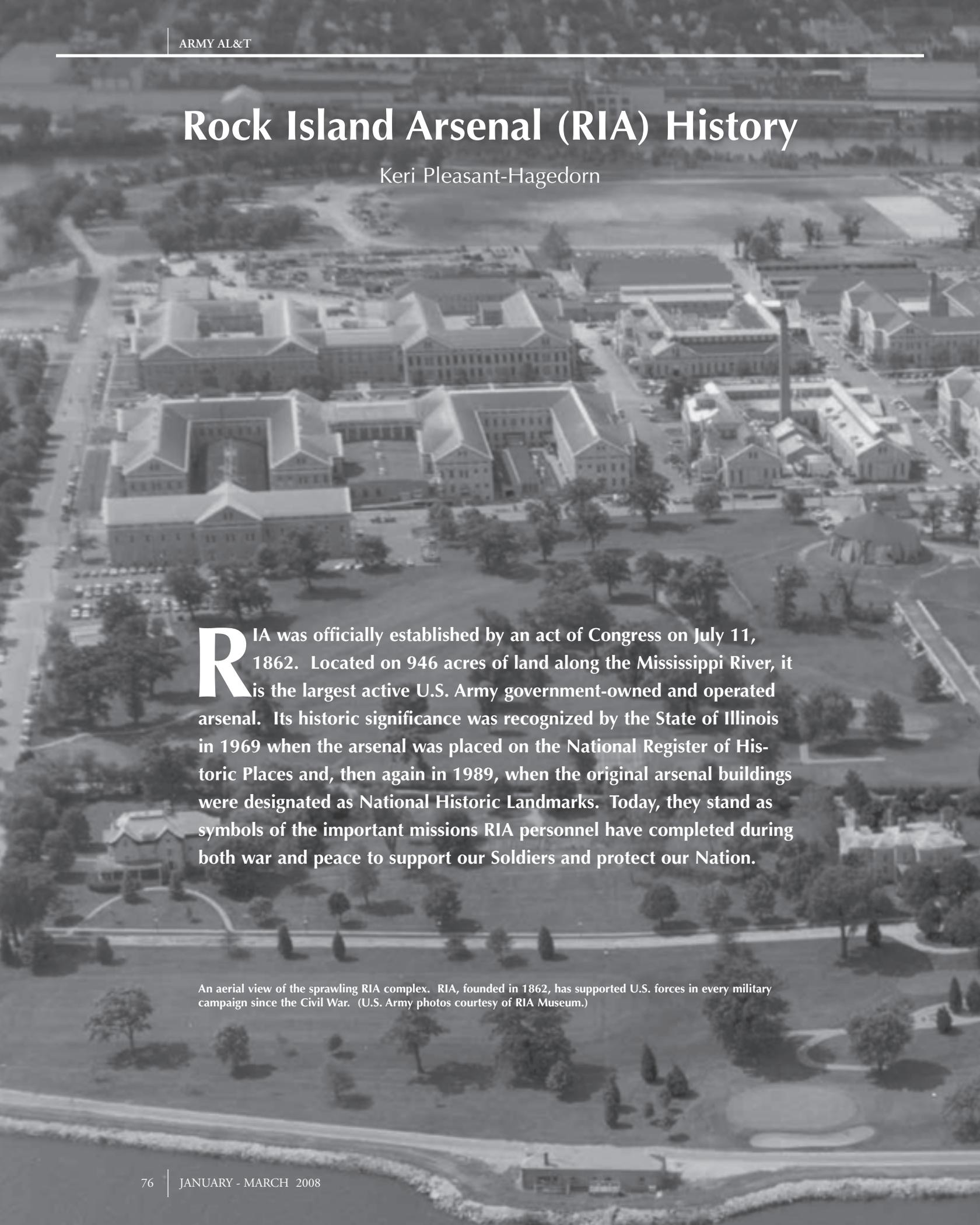


Rock Island Arsenal (RIA) History

Keri Pleasant-Hagedorn



RIA was officially established by an act of Congress on July 11, 1862. Located on 946 acres of land along the Mississippi River, it is the largest active U.S. Army government-owned and operated arsenal. Its historic significance was recognized by the State of Illinois in 1969 when the arsenal was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and, then again in 1989, when the original arsenal buildings were designated as National Historic Landmarks. Today, they stand as symbols of the important missions RIA personnel have completed during both war and peace to support our Soldiers and protect our Nation.

An aerial view of the sprawling RIA complex. RIA, founded in 1862, has supported U.S. forces in every military campaign since the Civil War. (U.S. Army photos courtesy of RIA Museum.)

After the War of 1812, the U.S. Army built Fort Armstrong on the lower end to keep the Native Americans peaceful, the river open to traffic and to protect settlers arriving from the east. The fort was abandoned in 1836, although the Army maintained a small depot there from 1840 to 1845 until, that too, was abandoned.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Congress needed to replace Harper's Ferry Armory, WV. RIA was ideally situated to provide ordnance stores to troops stationed in the area and to Soldiers guarding the frontier. In 1863, the Ordnance Department began constructing the first arsenal building, a storehouse, currently known as the Clock Tower building. At the same time, the Army Quartermaster Department was busy building a prisoner-of-war camp — the Rock Island Prison Barracks — to hold approximately 10,000 prisoners. Together, these and other projects made RIA's construction one of the largest military construction projects of the late 19th century. All that remains of the prison today is the Confederate Cemetery and the graves of the Union guards in the National Cemetery.

Brevet BG Thomas J. Rodman assumed command of RIA's construction in 1865. His genius is evident in the beautiful symmetry of the old stone buildings that still stand nearly intact. Rodman is considered the "Father of the Rock Island Arsenal" because of the critical role he played in designing and expanding the arsenal. LTC Daniel W. Flagler went on to complete much of Rodman's master plan.

In 1898, the Spanish-American War was RIA's first test to meet emergency wartime production requirements for haversacks, canteens, meat cans, tin cups, gun carriages, limbers and caissons. RIA also produced various

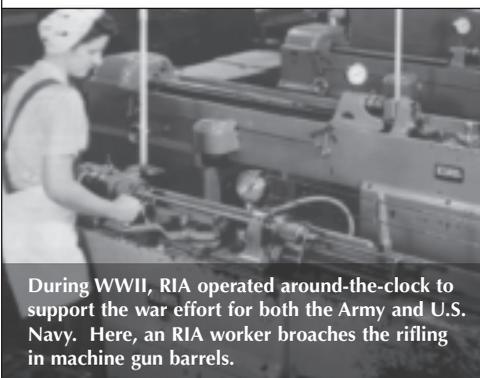
This image of an RIA shop interior, machinery and equipment was taken in August 1918. During WWI, RIA manufactured French-designed 75mm recuperators.



leather accouterments for the cavalry including saddles, saddlebags, rifle scabbards, bridles, halters, stirrups and straps. During World War I (WWI), RIA manufactured French-designed 75mm recuperators. Following the war, RIA became the Army's center for production of recoil mechanisms. From 1920 to 1930, RIA conducted developmental work on artillery, tanks, tractors and armored vehicles. The modern Army tank evolved from RIA shops.

WWII marked a period of production unsurpassed in RIA's history. RIA produced immense quantities of recoil mechanisms, gun carriages, gun mounts, machine guns, small-arms equipment and loading machines for the U.S. Navy, and enormous quantities of spare parts for various weapons and equipment. At its peak employment, RIA operated around-the-clock, with three shifts of employees totaling 18,675 in 1943.

During the Korean Conflict, RIA's principal activities focused on developing



During WWII, RIA operated around-the-clock to support the war effort for both the Army and U.S. Navy. Here, an RIA worker broaches the rifling in machine gun barrels.

and manufacturing rocket launchers and mortars, as well as overhauling tanks, artillery and small arms. In 1955, the Army established a command headquarters at Arsenal Island, and it has since hosted a series of headquarters. During the Vietnam War in the 1960s, RIA resumed production of manufactured aircraft machine gun systems, artillery recoil mechanisms and gun mounts, and completed overhaul of small arms, artillery and combat vehicles.

RIA completed an extensive modernization program, begun in the early 1980s, called Project Renovation of Armament Manufacturing (REARM). Under REARM, manufacturing operations were consolidated into a single building. During *Operation Desert Storm*, RIA manufactured carriages and recoil mechanisms, performed final assembly of M198 155mm Towed Howitzers, and produced gun mounts for M109 and M110 Self-Propelled Howitzers and for M1A1 tanks.

Today, RIA is the only U.S. Army facility that assembles tool sets, kits and outfits that support equipment in the field for the global war on terrorism. The arsenal manufactures gun mounts, recoil mechanisms, artillery carriages and other combat equipment. RIA is DOD's only complete, in-house metal parts forge, foundry and plating shop. The arsenal has contributed significantly to local, regional and national history while continuing to play a vital manufacturing role for our Nation's defense.

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