



Weapons Command (WECOM), RIA, and Vietnam

This year we begin a commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. The commemoration lasts until 2025



In 1955 the Ordnance Weapons Command (WECOM) was created to oversee the research and development of weapons systems and also to manage the arsenals at Rock Island, Watervliet, and Springfield. By 1966 the command had around 1600 employees working these programs. Employment numbers would grow further as the conflict in Vietnam continued to demand more munitions.

Support to the war effort was provided through WECOM for almost all Army weapons. These weapons included helicopter and other aircraft armament, rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, tanks and other combat vehicles, artillery, mortars, recoilless rifles, aiming and firing control instruments, and various items of support. WECOM did not manage Army missile systems.

Many of the WECOM managed weapons were directly produced on Rock Island Arsenal. Parts of the Sheridan system, Vulcan air defense system, helicopter mounted machine guns, mini guns, and rockets were in production during the Vietnam War era in the RIA shops.

Each of these projects was a massive undertaking. For example, the Sheridan defense system was comprised of the Armored Reconnaissance/Airborne Assault Vehicle, N551, 152-mm. Gun-Launcher, M81; and a Missile Guidance Set Group. Therefore each project assigned to RIA was a compilation of smaller production tasks, illustrating how much was needed to efficiently supply a war.

During the peak production of the Sheridan system, an average of \$75 million dollars was spent in each of the years, 1967-1969 at RIA.

WECOM and Rock Island Arsenal were also responsible for the design, development, and mass production by industry of carriages, equilibrators, mounts, and recoil mechanisms for both towed and self-propelled artillery. They were also responsible for the secondary armament, recoil mechanisms, and other turret components for tanks and other combat vehicles. Rock Island Arsenal also had the mission of design, development, and mass production by industry of pistols, bayonets, revolvers, and rifles as well as for grenade launchers, machine guns, and aircraft armament. Quite the laundry list of supplies to produce and maintain!

WECOM on Rock Island Arsenal was very active in supporting the troops in Vietnam. Management of weapons systems from here at RIA was essential to US combat in Vietnam.

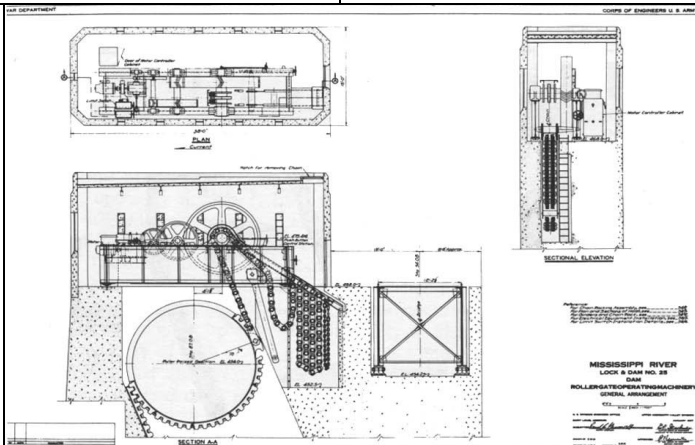
This Month in Military History

- **1776:** Independence Day— Two days after voting for independence, the Continental Congress adopts a formal 'Declaration of Independence'
- **1782:** American Privateers raid Lunenburg, Nova Scotia
- **1862:** Day 7 of Seven Days Battles: Malvern Hill, Virginia
- **1915:** Erich Muentner blows up Senate reception room
- **1957:** USS Grayback (SSG 574) launched, first submarine designed to fire guided missiles
- **1960:** USSR shoots down US RB-47
- **1976:** Last US troops leave Thailand
- **1988:** USS Vincennes (CG-49) accidentally shoots down an Iranian airliner; 290 die

Lock and Dam No. 15

The Great Depression lasted from the late 1920s through the 1930s. As a time of economic hardship, many people were without work. To turn the economy around, President F.D. Roosevelt presented his plan called the New Deal. A part of the plan was the 9 Foot Channel Project. The 9 Foot Channel Project was initially started during the Hoover administration through the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1930; however progress was slow due to the depression. Under the management of the New Deal, the project was given priority to speed to its construction and to be a means of providing employment during the depression.

The main goal of the 9 Foot Channel Project was to ensure uninterrupted travel on the Mississippi. This could be accomplished by creating a channel depth of at least 9 feet at all points along the river. In order to complete the project, a series of 26 lock and dam systems in a sort of stair step pat-



tern were built from St Paul to St Louis.

Rock Island Arsenal is the home of Lock and Dam 15. Construction started in 1931 and it was finished and opened on March 7, 1934. Lock and Dam 15 was the first to be constructed along the Mississippi and has other unique characteristics as well. Lock and Dam 15 is the only one in the 9 Foot Channel project to not be at a right angle to the river, to incorporate a power plant which generates the electricity to operate its gates, and to be made out of only roller gates. Roller gates

move along inclined supporting rails by a hoist through sprocket chains around the ends of a cylinder. This cylinder is a horizontally placed drum at the crest of the dam and is used to regulate water elevation. Today we most notice the system when the river is in flood stage. As the 9 Foot Channel Project progressed, different conditions and lessons learned from watching the early dams function brought about changes to future dams. Roller gates were first changed to submersible roller gates, and then switched out all together for Tainter gates as more of the 26 dams were built along the Mississippi.

General information about Lock and Dam 15 is: the main lock is 110 feet by 600 feet. The normal elevation for the upper pool is about 561.0, although it can hold up to 563.25. The project of just creating Lock and Dam 15 cost \$7,480,000. Lock and Dam 15 might better be referred to as Locks and Dam 15 because there are two locks: an auxiliary one for smaller boat traffic to come through, as well as the main lock for larger traffic such as barges.