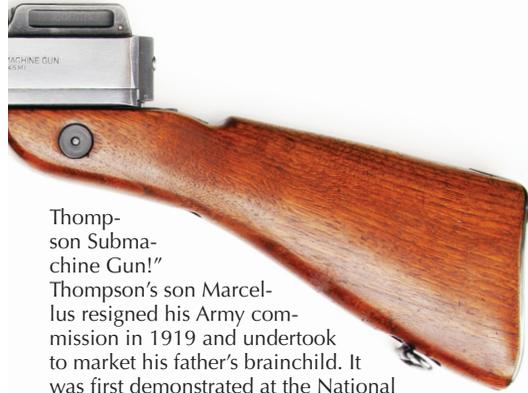


Thompson Submachine Gun



Thompson Submachine Gun!"

Thompson's son Marcelus resigned his Army commission in 1919 and undertook to market his father's brainchild. It was first demonstrated at the National Matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, in 1920, and it was hailed as the most revolutionary small arm in the world at the time.

John Thompson approached the Colt company in Hartford to make the gun in quantity. Colt agreed to make 15,000 basic firing mechanisms. Lyman Gun Sight Corporation agreed to make sights and stocks. Funds were supplied by Thomas Ryan, secured by a chattel mortgage on all Auto-Ordnance property.

Those first 15,000 guns were all there until World War II developed. They were sold to police and civilians, and those Model 1921 Thompsons certainly made the '20s roar! The military had not yet taken a great deal of interest except for the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard, which had bought a number. Then the Navy bought some engineered for a lower cyclic rate, which were known as the Model of 1928. In World War II, interest was renewed by the military, and contracts were let with the Savage Arms Company in addition to Auto-Ordnance. The gun was then greatly simplified, and bare-bones Thompsons without the Blish lock or adjustable rear sight were designated as the M1 and later the M1A1 submachine gun models. The M1A1 had a simple nub on the face of bolt to substitute for a firing pin. Neither of these models would accept high capacity drum magazines or slip-off detachable stocks.

Today, both full-auto and semiauto Thompsons are still made at the reconstituted Auto-Ordnance company, now fully owned by Kahr arms. The Model 1928 gun illustrated was made in West Hurler, New York, in the postwar years, before the acquisition of AO by Kahr.

The Thompsons could easily be regarded as the classic submachine guns, arguably the first of their breed. Collector interest is high, and the full-automatic guns have become very expensive, as no more are available to the civilian market by U.S. law. To many, a full-auto Thompson is the "holy grail" of collecting, and properly so. Those who own them are envied!

John T. Thompson

By John Marshall

His name was John Taliaferro (pronounced "Toliver") Thompson. A multi-talented career Army officer, his main claim to fame was being the driving force behind the Thompson submachine gun in the late nineteen-teens. However, the man played several pivotal roles in his lifetime that had substantial effect on the course of U.S. history.



Born on the last day of December 1860 in Newport, Kentucky, Thompson was born into a military family. His father was a Union Civil War colonel and a career officer, so the young Thompson grew up on various military posts. He graduated from West Point in 1882, 11th in his class. After assignment to the Army Ordnance Department in 1890, he was later promoted to Lt. Colonel and appointed as Chief Ordnance Officer. As the Spanish-American war developed, he consulted with 1st Lt. John H. Parker and endorsed his taking Gatling guns along to Cuba. As it turned out, Parker's suppressing fire with Gatlings on the San Juan Heights enabled a successful charge up Kettle Hill by Theodore Roosevelt. That battle became Roosevelt's ticket to later political success. During that war, Thompson distinguished himself by efficiently running ordnance supply operations, sending over 18,000 tons of munitions to Cuba on his own authority.

In 1904, Thompson had been promoted to colonel. He and Major Luis LaGarde of the Medical Corps conducted tests of various pistol calibers on live cattle and some human cadavers. Their recommendation was that any new military pistol or revolver should have a caliber not less than .45. From these tests, the concept of the .45 ACP cartridge was born and it found use in John Browning's immortal Model 1911 pistol. It was Thompson who supervised the development of the Model 1903 rifle and who chaired the ordnance board that approved the 1911 pistol.

During WWI, Thompson retired from the Army to become Chief Engineer at Remington Arms Company. He supervised the construction of the Eddystone Plant in Chester, Pennsylvania. That became the largest small arms plant in the world and manufactured rifles for Britain, the U.S. and Russia.

In 1916, Thompson began work on developing a "trench broom" hand-held automatic weapon, but as the U.S. entered the war in 1917, he took leave from that project and rejoined the Army. He was promoted to brigadier general and served as Director of Arsenals, supervising all small arms production for the Army. He received a Distinguished Service Medal for this work. Following the war he retired again to continue work on the famed Thompson submachine gun.

Thompson died at age 79 on June 21, 1940 at his residence in Newport, Kentucky. His contributions to his country were considerable and went far beyond the development of the gun that bears his name.

