



## **Remember Me: Captain James Totten**

**Born:** September 11, 1818, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

**Military Service:** Artillery officer in the United States army. Surrendered the Little Rock Arsenal to Arkansas Governor Henry Rector in February, 1861.

**Battles fought:** Wilson's Creek, MO; Fort Blakely, AL

**Death:** October 1, 1871, Sedalia, Missouri

**Age when died:** 53

### **Early life of Captain James Totten**

James Totten was born on September 11, 1818 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father, Dr. William Totten, was a veteran of the War of 1812 and moved to Little Rock with his family in 1840 where he helped to select the site for the U.S. Arsenal. The Totten family remained in Little Rock until the Civil War started and was very popular while living here.

In 1841, James Totten graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. In November 1860, Totten was serving as a captain in the U.S. military stationed in Kansas when he and 65 soldiers were sent to the U.S. arsenal in Little Rock. For some time no soldiers had been stationed at the arsenal. So when Capt. Totten and the soldiers arrived, the people of Little Rock grew curious. But, because the Totten family had lived in Little Rock for the past 20 years, the people were friendly towards Captain Totten. This changed in February 1861.



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### **Captain Totten and the Arsenal Crisis**

Evaluating his options to defend the post, Totten was worried that if shooting broke out it would be impossible to avoid hitting homes built around the arsenal, and that innocent people could be killed or injured. The heart of Little Rock's business district was only half a mile away, and cannon fire could cause damage to businesses. For now, Totten fortified a strongpoint in the basement of the Tower building to repel any direct assault.

Many private citizens visited Totten and quietly urged him to surrender, citing the loss of innocent life and property and the likelihood of igniting statewide, if not national, civil war. Even Totten's junior officers urged a peaceful solution, urging Totten to avoid a fight with the surrounding militia.

In the end, any defense was doomed to failure. The arsenal's forces were outnumbered by at least 10 to 1, with additional armed citizens streaming into town. If attacked, Totten simply could not open or return fire without endangering civilians who were his friends and relatives.



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## **Captain James Totten and the Women of Little Rock**

In appreciation for Totten's decision not to fight at the arsenal to avoid bloodshed and the destruction of their homes and property, 107 women of Little Rock presented him a sword as a memento of his courage.

“The ladies of Little Rock present this Sword as a testimonial of gratitude for your gallant and humane conduct in saving our city from destruction, and our relatives in becoming participants in an incipient civil war, the end of which, heaven could only know. . . Accept this tribute of our respect and gratitude, wear it in defense of your country, but sooner let it rust in its scabbard, than draw it in the cause of injustice or oppression.”

On August 10, 1861, Totten's Battery played a key role for Federal troops during the Battle of Wilson's Creek – the first battle in which Arkansans participated. An outcry arose from the women of Little Rock who accused Totten of fighting against Arkansas troops. Mary Weaver (who helped organize the sword presentation) wrote to her son, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Omer Weaver, saying, "Totten is in Missouri wielding the sword we gave him against us!"



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### **Captain James Totten's report on the Battle of Wilson's Creek, Missouri**

On the morning of August 10, 1861, Captain James Totten and his artillery battled against Arkansas artillery from Little Rock. The Arkansas unit had been named the Totten Artillery in honor of Captain Totten, but later changed its name to the Pulaski Light Artillery. Unknown to Captain Totten, the enemy he faced that morning included his old friends from Little Rock.

*"... As the position of the enemy's guns was [hidden], the gunners of my pieces were obliged to [aim] their pieces by the flash and smoke of the opposing artillery."*

*- Captain James Totten*

One of the Arkansas soldiers Captain Totten fought against that day was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Omer Weaver of Little Rock, who was killed during the battle.