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**George Washington Rains and
Confederate Gunpowder - II**

Lead: During the Civil War, the Confederacy faced serious challenges, not the least of which was having no source of gunpowder. To solve that problem, they turned to George Washington Rains.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The key ingredient in gunpowder is saltpeter, the general name for three naturally occurring nitrates, the most common in North America being potassium nitrate. Called by some niter, it was combined

with sulfur and charcoal, and together they were rolled, pressed crushed, granulated and dried in a process that was conducted almost nowhere in large quantities in the South prior to 1861. To defend itself the Confederacy would have to solve that problem. Ordinance chief Josiah Gorgas appointed Artillery major George Washington Rains, third in his West Point class, and who had served with distinction in the Mexican War.

Rains first to turned the immediate needs of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, by setting up a small mill in Nashville drawing his saltpeter supplies from caves in Eastern Tennessee. He then concentrated on

the construction of a giant powder mill to generate the large supplies that would be necessary in the war effort. He chose for the site, Augusta, Georgia deep in the Southern heartland and from the day that mill went on line in April 1862, the Confederacy never ran out of gunpowder. For a man who had never made the black substance before Rains created an amazingly efficient operation. The mill produced 5000 lbs per day before the end.

As the borders of the Confederacy shrank in the final years of the war, saltpeter caves fell behind enemy lines. Rains solution was to urge the creation of artificial niter beds dug two feet deep, composed of earth,

rotting vegetables, animal carcasses, and decomposing animal and human waste. After 18 months of cooking, mixing and tending the pit, it was drained and high-quality saltpeter was taken out in large amounts to feed George Washington Rains south-wide gunpowder production machine.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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