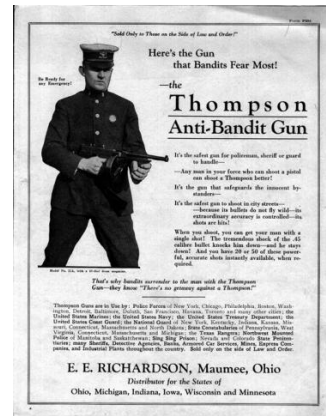


0. WHAT ABOUT THOSE GUNS? - Story Preface

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This advertisement, from the 1920s, boasts that the "Tommy Gun" was an "anti-bandit gun" which dealers "sold only to those on the side of law and order." Despite such claims, these types of guns ended-up in the hands of gangsters who did a great deal of damage with them throughout the Prohibition Era. Click on the image for a better view.

Gangsters like the fictional Michael Sullivan and his real-life counterparts have always been associated with "Tommy Guns." What is a Tommy Gun and how did it come to be the Roaring Twenties' weapon-of-choice?

Before the U.S. joined World War I, General John T. Thompson wanted to make a weapon that could effectively help to end "The Great War." He wanted to make a "trench broom" that would be lighter for a soldier to carry than a machine gun.

His prototype, code-named "[Annihilator I](#)," could empty a 20-round magazine in less than a second. But the first shipment of prototype weapons reached the New York City docks on November 11, 1918 - the day the war ended.

Auto-Ordnance, the manufacturer of the firearm, now had to modify it for non-military use. They also had to pick a name for the new product. Should it be an "Autogun?" A "Machine Pistol?" The Board of Directors settled on the name "Submachine Gun" to reflect its size and function. And ... they decided to name it after General Thompson who was most responsible for its existence.

Everyone who saw demonstrations of the gun was awed by its power. But sales were slow. World War I was over and the Thompson Submachine Gun had no battle experience. Even though it was cheap (around \$225), the US Army paid much more for proven weapons.

Then Auto-Ordnance came up with a notorious advertisement that improved sales. Mindful that their product could wreak havoc in the wrong hands, the company had an agreement with their dealers:

Thompson guns are for use by those on the side of law and order, and the Auto-Ordnance Corporation agents and dealers are authorized to make sales to responsible parties only.

Not all dealers followed the agreement. General Thompson was extremely upset when the gun that bore his name consistently ended up in the hands of gangsters. To this day, the "Tommy Gun" is associated with the likes of Al Capone and John Dillinger.

As more gangsters used more deadly weapons to protect their bootlegging turf, the American people realized Prohibition was a disaster. Not only had it failed to end the use of intoxicating liquor, it had opened the door to nationwide lawlessness.

Congress passed, and the people ratified, the 21st Amendment which repealed Prohibition. It became the law on December 5, 1933 (officially ending the ban on alcohol in America). In the meantime, women in America had finally gained the right to vote when Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment.

Although the ban on intoxicating liquor had lasted only thirteen years, it forever left its mark on American history. The decade that roared is still the one which many alive at the time would like to forget. The Tommy Gun, however, lived on. It was modified to become the "constant companion" of a different group of men: the life-saving soldiers of World War II.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WHAT-ABOUT-THOSE-GUNS-Road-to-Perdition>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WHAT-ABOUT-THOSE-GUNS-Road-to-Perdition>

Media Stream



Annihilator I - Thompson Machine Gun

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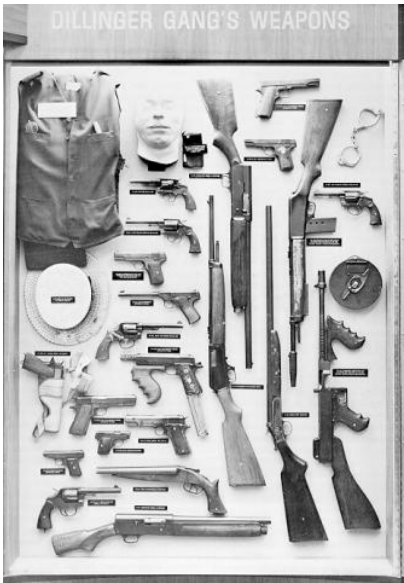
Tommy Gun - Thompson Model 1921

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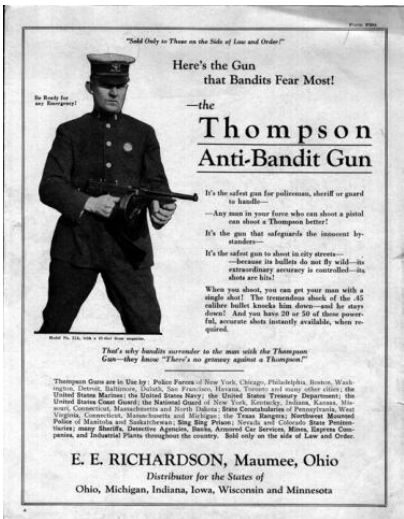
Dillinger Gang Weapons - Display

Image online, courtesy the fbi.gov website.

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