"More Than Just Inventors"

RICHARD M. CUTTS, RICHARD M. CUTTS JR., AND THE ETHICAL CHALLENGE OF THE OFFICER-INVENTOR

by John A. Sheehan

Abstract: This article examines the ethical decisions of two enterprising interwar period Marine officers, Colonel Richard M. Cutts and Brigadier General Richard M. Cutts Jr. Known for their development of a muzzle device used on the Thompson submachine gun, the Cuttses have been treated casually by historians as innocuous inventors. This article reveals their crucial role in generating interest in their device and energetic advocacy for official adoption of the Thompson submachine gun. Drawing support from other officers in the Marine Corps and allies in manufacturing, they eagerly pursued widespread sales of their device. Pulled by conflicting demands as Marines, inventors, and business partners, this article contends that they engaged in activity that blurred private business matters with their professional duties as Marines. Examination of the Cuttses invites scholars and practitioners to contemplate the ethical challenges faced by Marines past and present.
Keywords: ethics, professional ethics, technology, weapons procurement, Richard M. Cutts, Richard M. Cutts Jr., Cutts Compensator, Thompson submachine gun

When asked in an interview about the Marine Corps' adoption of the Thompson submachine gun, Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller recalled that "the man that gave it the biggest push . . . was Bleasdale, Colonel [Victor F.] Bleasdale" in Nicaragua.[1] Although acknowledging Bleasdale's role, General Puller failed to observe the surreptitious efforts of other Marines to induce the U.S. military into formal procurement of the Thompson gun. This article uses the personal papers of two inventors with a vested financial interest in sales of the Thompson gun, Colonel Richard M. Cutts and his son, Brigadier General Richard M. Cutts Jr., to explore their dogged campaign for its formal adoption. It contends that both men played a critical role in agitating for the weapon's procurement by the Marine Corps and other branches of Service through a self-described "planned campaign."[2] As a result of their efforts, they found themselves simultaneously occupying roles as father and son, inventors, business partners, and Marine officers. The pull of competing interests led both men into compromising ethical territory that blurred the lines between professional duties, private enterprise, and personal relationships. Examination of the Cuttses provides historians with a case study of how two Marine officers delineated their conflicting roles

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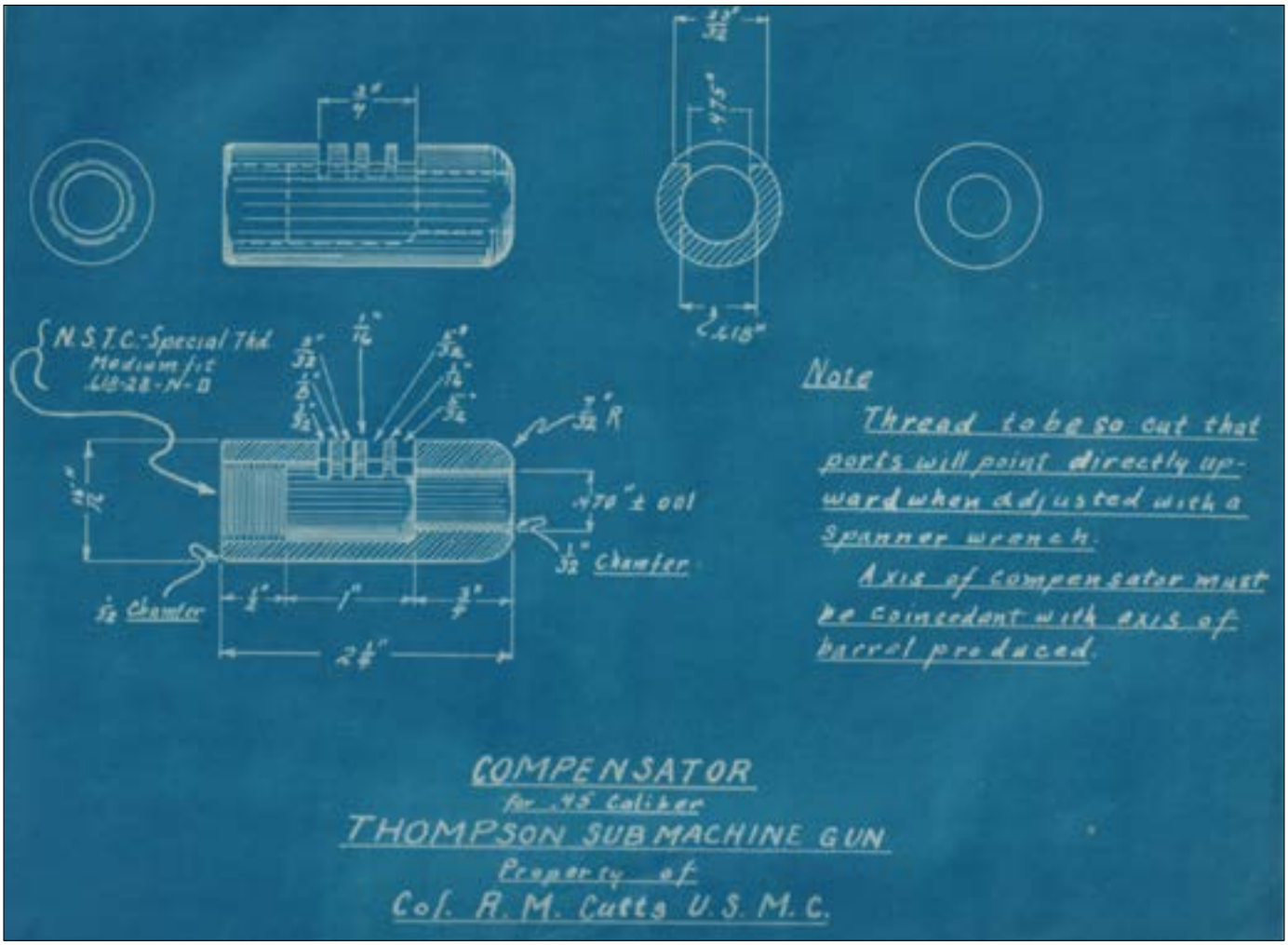
[1] Lewis B. Puller and William A. Lee, interview with John H. Magruder III, 25–26 September 1961, transcript (Oral History Section, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA), 89.

[2] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 6 January 1931, box 16, folder 146, Cutts Collection, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division, hereafter Cutts Collection.



Cutts Collection, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division (Cutts Collection), box 30, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Blueprint for the Thompson submachine gun's Cutts Compensator.

and defined their ethical boundaries during the interwar years.[3]

On 20 July 1925, Richard Malcolm Cutts Jr. filed a patent for a device he described as a "climb arrester" for small arms. In use, the device was fitted onto the muzzle of a weapon. When the weapon fired, the device directed the gases produced by the burning propellant upward through ventilating ports. This was intended to drive the weapon down and counteract the tendency of small arms to rise when fired. The inventor, Cutts Jr., was not merely a casual tinkerer. He was a young Naval Academy graduate and newly commissioned Marine lieutenant. His patent was the culmination of extensive collaboration with his father and fellow Marine officer, Colonel Richard Malcolm Cutts. Their work together produced a second patent that built on the original concept of the climb arrester. Filed in 1926, the "anticlimb device" featured the addition of ports along the sides to divert propelling gases rearward. While the climb arrester sought to negate the rise of a weapon when fired, the second patent aimed to counteract both climb and recoil. Collectively, their attempts to compensate for muzzle climb and reduce recoil to manageable levels resulted in a series of devices known generically as *compensators*. Although adapted for different weapons during

[3] Rather than arguing that the Cuttses acted ethically or unethically, this article seeks to historicize the notion of ethics and interprets these concepts as a constructed set of ideas.

their experiments, perhaps the most recognizable was the compensator designed for the .45-caliber Thompson submachine gun.[4]

Manufactured by Auto-Ordnance Corporation, the Thompson submachine gun was state of the art in the early 1920s. Still, the Thompson gun had drawbacks. When fired on fully automatic, the high rate of fire drove the muzzle up, making it difficult to fire with any degree of accuracy.[5] Unless the Thompson gun could be controlled, future adoption of the weapon was questionable. The Cuttses recognized an opportunity to apply their newly patented device. They believed that muzzle climb could be reduced to a controllable level by equipping the Thompson gun with their compensator and that Marines armed with compensated Thompsons could deliver a high volume of fire against their opponents with greater precision. To Colonel Cutts and his son, the Thompson gun and the compensator were an inseparable unit.

Many histories casually mention the Cuttses' invention without further exploration or prefer to focus on the technological development of the Thompson gun itself. The means through which the Thompson gun was brought into and adopted by the Marine Corps has been largely overlooked. Similarly, the role of the compensator and those invested in its financial success in bringing about firing demonstrations, generating publicity, and developing a doctrinal framework in which the compensated Thompson could be employed has been neglected.[6] While the device may seem a technological novelty or a minor improvement to an existing weapon, its inventors were active participants that shaped Marine Corps equipment procurement during the interwar years.

The Inventors

Colonel Richard Malcolm Cutts was born to Navy lieutenant commander Richard Malcolm Cutts on 13 November 1878. He did not adopt the use of the suffix *junior*, although he was the second in a line of three bearing the same name. Cutts initially served as an ensign in the Navy but received his commission in the Marine Corps in July 1899.[7]

Described by one historian as a "handsome, dynamic officer," Colonel Cutts served abroad extensively during his 35 years in uniform.[8] His time in the Pacific included tours in the Philippines in 1903, Hawaii in 1915, and as the Fleet Marine officer of the Pacific Fleet from November 1916 to October 1918.[9] Colonel Cutts commanded several units, including the Fourteenth Marine Regiment from 1918 to 1919

[4] R. M. Cutts Jr., Climb Arrester, U.S. Patent 1,605,393, filed 20 July 1925, issued 2 November 1926; and R. M. Cutts Jr., Anticlimb Device, U.S. Patent 1,636,357, filed 22 May 1926, issued 19 July 1927.

[5] Col Cutts related to a colleague that he tested the Thompson while in command of the 10th Marines around 1920, but found its fire uncontrollable. Cutts to Col C. S. Hill, 25 February 1927, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.

[6] For histories of the Thompson that discuss the Cutts Compensator as used on the Thompson but neglect the Cuttses' role in pursuing adoption and the ethical dilemma that resulted, see Frank Iannamico, *American Thunder: Military Thompson Submachine Guns*, 3d ed. (Henderson, NV: Chipotle Publishing, 2015); Tracie L. Hill, *Thompson: The American Legend—The First Submachine Gun* (Cobourg, ON: Collector Grade Publications, 1996); and Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of World War II* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 1994), 133–43. For brief histories of the Cutts Compensator, which similarly ignore the controversial conflict of interest, see Sarandis Papadopoulos, "Solving a Combat Problem at the Individual Level: The Cutts Compensator," *CHIPS*, 1 September 2017; and Richard M. Cutts Jr., "The Story of the Cutts Comp," *Guns*, November 1957, 25–55.

[7] "Colonel Richard Malcolm Cutts Passes Away," *Marine Corps Gazette* 19, no. 4 (November 1934): 22; and "Colonel Richard Cutts, U. S. M. C., Dies at 56," *New York Times*, 25 November 1934.

[8] Allan R. Millett, *In Many a Strife: General Gerald C. Thomas and the U.S. Marine Corps, 1917–1956* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 103.

[9] BGen Edwin Howard Simmons and Col Joseph H. Alexander, *Through the Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 135; and Maj Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, updated and revised ed. (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2014), 103.

Cutts Collection, box 31, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division
Richard M. Cutts Jr. (left) and Richard M. Cutts (right) after a hunting trip.

and the Tenth Marine Regiment from 1919 to 1922.[10] He may best be remembered as a Caribbean campaigner. From 1923 to 1924, he served in the Dominican Republic, creating the *Policia Nacional Domincana*. Colonel Cutts later took command of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in Haiti before being assigned to the Naval War College.[11] While on the staff of the Naval War College, Colonel Cutts was scheduled to be placed on the retired list due to health issues. He died on 24 November 1934, one week before his retirement.[12]

His son, Richard M. Cutts Jr., the third and final Cutts to carry the name, was born on 9 January 1903.[13] Cutts Jr. graduated from the Naval Academy in 1923; following in the footsteps of his father, he was commissioned in the Marine Corps. A skilled marksman, Cutts Jr. served with the Marine Corps Rifle Team and won the National Trophy Individual rifle match at Camp Perry, Ohio, in 1927.[14] Following a tour as an aide in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's White House from 1932 to 1934, as a captain Cutts Jr. was stationed in China. During World War II, he requested combat duty and commanded the 2d Marine Regiment from September 1944 to October 1945. After the war's end, then-colonel Cutts Jr. led the regiment in the occupation of Nagasaki. He was promoted to brigadier general before his retirement in 1946 after 23 years of service. Brigadier General Cutts Jr. died 14 June 1973 at Bethesda Naval Hospital.[15]

To add confusion to the generational designations used by the Cuttses, sometime after the death of his father, Cutts Jr. stopped using a suffix. This extended from personal correspondence to legal documents. For the purposes of this article, the senior

[10] LtCol Ronald J. Brown, *A Brief History of the 14th Marines* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, 1990), 87; and Maj David N. Buckner, *A Brief History of the 10th Marines* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, History and Museums Division, 1981), 123.

[11] Millett, *In Many a Strife*, 103–4; and Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991), 205–6.

[12] "Colonel Richard Malcolm Cutts Passes Away," 22; and H. L. Roosevelt to Cutts, 1 March 1934, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection.

[13] Richard Cutts, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850–2010, Ancestry.com, accessed 28 December 2018.

[14] Maj Robert E. Barde, *The History of Marine Corps Competitive Marksmanship* (Washington, DC: Marksmanship Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1961), 378, 447.

[15] "Gen. R.M. Cutts, Ordnance Inventor," *Washington Post*, 16 June 1973, D5; "Brig. Gen. Richard Cutts Dead; Marine Invented a Rifle Device," *New York Times*, 16 June 1973, 30; Danny J. Crawford et al., *The 2d Marine Division and Its Regiments* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 2001), 25; and Cutts Jr. to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Combat Duty, Request for," 29 June 1943, box 3, folder 14, Cutts Collection.

Marine Cutts will be referred to as Colonel Cutts and his son as Cutts Jr.[16]

The Device

The device that came to be known by its commercial trademark—Cutts Compensator—has an unclear origin. During the course of their lifetimes, Colonel Cutts and his son variously took credit and assigned different motives for the development of the compensator. This spawned several versions of its invention.

In July 1925, Cutts Jr. wrote to the secretary of the Navy regarding his patent application. After suggesting that his patent be treated as a military secret and kept in the "secret files of the Patent Office," he informed the secretary of the Navy that he alone invented the climb arrester "while attached to the Engineer Battalion, Marine Barracks, Quantico."[17] In a later history of the compensator, then-retired Brigadier General Cutts Jr. wrote that he became "greatly interested in small arms" while competing with the Marine Corps Rifle Team. In this account, the idea for a compensator came to him while observing the M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). He noted that the BAR's automatic fire could be controlled by "attaching heavy weights to its muzzle," but the added bulk made the "solution . . . undesirable." It was allegedly then that Cutts Jr. recognized the principles that could be used to negate the rise of a barrel during firing. Gases could be diverted as in a steam turbine. Perhaps embellishing his invention, he placed the compensator in the context of the jet age as the "forerunner of our present jet propulsion."[18] In each of these accounts, Cutts Jr. presented himself as the sole inventor of the compensator.

Colonel Cutts also laid claim to the idea of a compensator device. Writing to his son in 1927, Colonel Cutts stated that he understood himself to be "the originator" of the compensator.[19] He later placed the idea for a compensator in the context of the Marine Corps' amphibious mission. Colonel Cutts stated he had "been working on the equipment for the Marine force from a technical viewpoint for about 18 years." He stated that "the Compensator . . . was born because of the necessity for the increase of firepower of the infantryman, and defense of boats from airplane strafing."[20] He reiterated this account in a 1933 report to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Colonel Cutts reported that the compensator emerged from his studies "undertaken with the view of increasing the fire power of the Marine landing forces." The compensator was designed to provide a landing force with increased accuracy and controllable firepower; this would allow a small force to "get ashore . . . and secure the necessary penetration for a successful landing."[21] While Cutts Jr. described his role as the originator of the compensator idea, Colonel Cutts claimed ownership by defining the broader application for the device.

At times, they explained the compensator as the product of a collaborative effort. Cutts Jr. wrote in 1929 that he and his father worked on the idea of a compensator since his graduation from the Naval Academy in 1923.[22] In 1936, Cutts Jr. stated that work was done together as a "hobby" between father and

[16] This can be seen most readily in patent applications. His final issued patent does not include "Jr." See R. M. Cutts, Choke Attachment for Shotguns, U.S. Patent 3,045,379, filed 25 May 1959, issued 24 July 1962. Additionally, their names have caused some confusion. For example, Moskin incorrectly attributes Col Cutts with having served as a White House aide and as a national-champion marksman. J. Robert Moskin, *The Story of the U.S. Marine Corps* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979), 197. For examples incorrectly listing both father and son as brigadier generals, see John G. Griffiths, "The Infamous Reising Gun Remembered," *Fortitudine*, Fall 1989, 17; and John G. Griffiths, "Reising Gun," in Henry I. Shaw Jr., *First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal* (Washington, DC: Marine Corps Historical Center, 1992), 37.

[17] Cutts Jr. to Secretary of the Navy, "Patent Application for Improvement on Fire Arms," July 1925, box 11, folder 89, Cutts Collection.

[18] Cutts Jr., "The Cutts Compensator," box 29, folder 242, Cutts Collection. Cutts Jr. earlier contended that his invention was derived from the function of a steam turbine. See Cutts Jr. to Monroe Mayhoff, 17 November 1934, box 11, folder 88, Cutts Collection.

[19] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 15 April 1927, box 3, folder 15, Cutts Collection.

[20] Cutts to Pickett, 23 April 1932, box 16, folder 148, Cutts Collection.

[21] Cutts to the Major General Commandant, "Cuban Arms," 4 October 1933, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection.

[22] Cutts Jr. to LtCmdr McFall, 2 December 1929, box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection.

son on their own initiative despite "the fact that the Service had first claim on our time."[23]

In all of the compensator origin stories, neither Cutts wavered from the device being their own idea, developed on their own time, and supported by their personal financial resources. "I might mention," Cutts Jr. wrote in 1934, that "we have spent thousands of dollars and many years in research work" to develop the compensator.[24] Variously referred to as the Cutts Compensator or just "the Comp," the compensator belonged to the Cuttses. Now invested in the success of the compensator as inventors and financiers, they sought to exploit the business potential of their device.

The Cutts Compensator

Despite an unclear origin, the compensator's introduction into the market began shortly after the first patent was filed. Profits were initially divided between three partners. In addition to father and son, another Marine officer joined their enterprise with an interest in its success. Victor F. Bleasdale, a Navy Cross recipient in World War I, collected a small share of the royalties of compensator sales.[25]

A fourth member later joined the Cutts Compensator partnership. Philip P. Quayle, a physicist with the U.S. Bureau of Standards, acted as a "consulting engineer" for the Cuttses.[26] Quayle aided Colonel Cutts in the improvement of the compensator, particularly in the refinement of the compensator porting. Writing to his son several days before the patent for the anticlimb device was filed, Colonel Cutts credited Quayle, for as he wrote, "the new porting is Quayles idea." Clearly, he felt that Quayle was critical to the development of "the Comp" in general. Colonel Cutts stated that the "knowledge of effects and how to get them lies in Quayle and myself."[27] In addition to developing new porting, Quayle used spark photography to capture the compensator in action and developed a test apparatus so that the effects of the compensator could be measured with scientific precision.[28] Like Bleasdale, he collected a small percentage of the royalties.[29] Quayle's scientific contributions led Colonel Cutts to write to the Commandant, securing a commission in the Volunteer Marine Corps Reserves for Quayle.[30]

The Cutts Compensator partners never manufactured their own compensators. Instead, they entered into contracts with manufacturers, such as Auto-Ordnance Corporation for military arms or Lyman for sporting arms.[31] These companies were licensed to manufacture and sell Cutts Compensators. The Cutts

[23] Cutts Jr. to John W. Young, 10 July 1936, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.

[24] Cutts Jr. to Monroe Mayhoff, 17 November 1934, box 11, folder 88, Cutts Collection.

[25] For information regarding Bleasdale's 10-percent royalty on the distribution of profits, see Memorandum, 5 December 1927, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection. Between 8 February 1928 and 5 September 1934, Victor Bleasdale was paid $1,577 for royalties. See "Royalties Paid from February 8, 1928 to September 5, 1934," box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection. Interestingly, this memorandum concerns "a device . . . being variously [referred] to as the C & B Device, anti-climb device, and Climb arrester." What role, if any, Bleasdale played in developing the device remains unclear. One must wonder if the C&B device referred to stood for "Cutts & Bleasdale." Memorandum, 1 July 1926, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection. For Bleasdale's Navy Cross, see "U.S. Marine Corps Navy Cross Recipients, World War I, 1917–1918," DOD Valor Website, accessed 28 December 2018.

[26] Cutts to Mrs. Mary Quayle, 10 August 1931, box 12, folder 106, Cutts Collection.

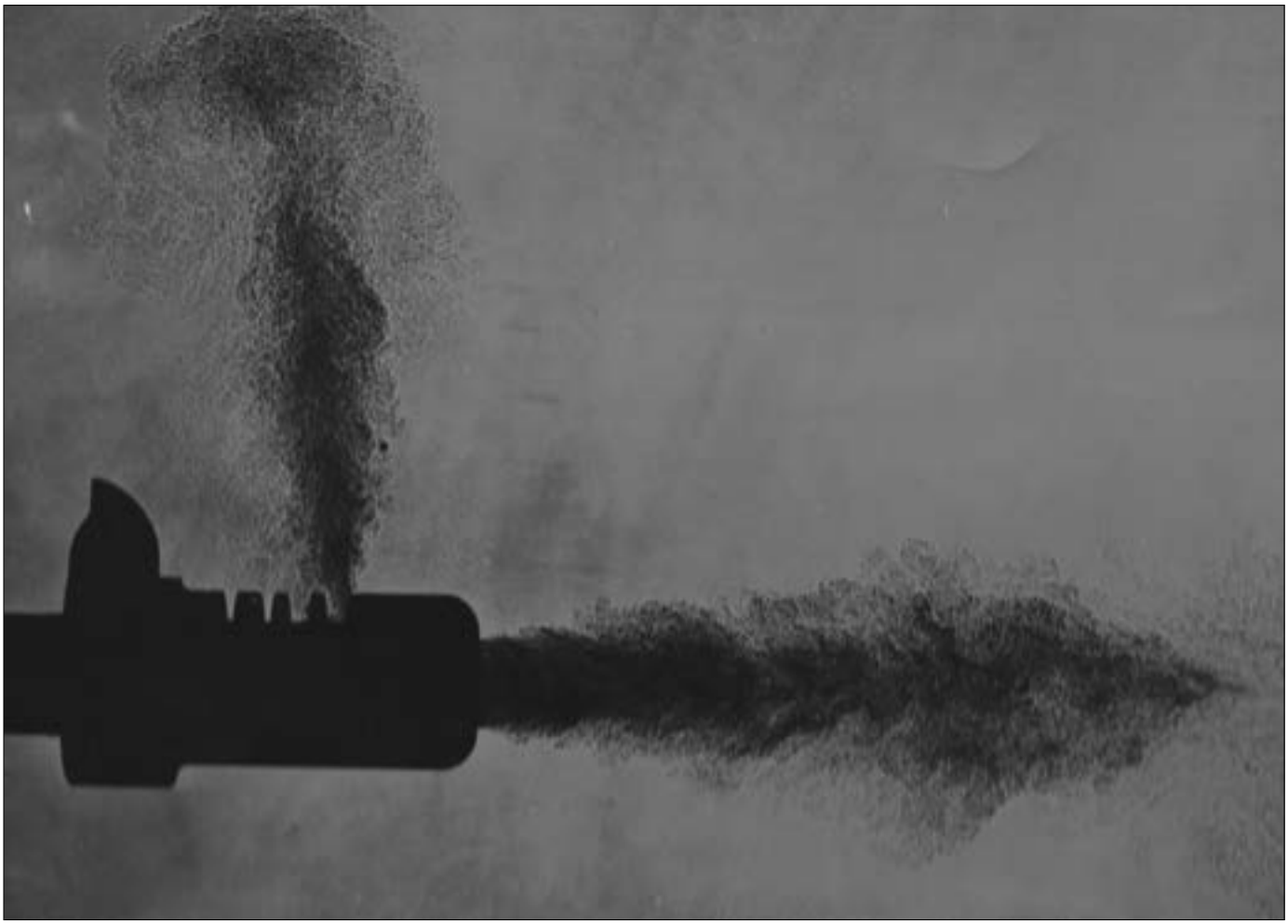
[27] This may refer generally to the porting found on the anticlimb device or a technical change to the porting on another variety of compensator. Col Cutts remained vague in his remarks. Cutts to Cutts Jr., 14 May 1926, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection.

[28] Cutts Jr., "The Cutts Compensator," box 29, folder 242, Cutts Collection; and Philip P. Quayle, "The Cutts Compensator," *Army Ordnance*, March–April 1927, 347–54. Quayle had earlier experimented with using spark photography and published his findings in June 1925. See Philip P. Quayle, "Spark Photography and Its Application to Some Problems in Ballistics," *Scientific Papers of the Bureau of Standards* 20, no. 508 (June 1925): 237–76, http://dx.doi.org/10.6028/nbsscipaper.192.

[29] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 14 May 1926, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection. For an example of a $2,444 royalty payment made to Quayle's widow after his death, see "Royalties Paid from February 8, 1928 to September 5, 1934," box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection.

[30] Cutts to the MajGen Commandant, "Reserve Commission of Mr. Philip P. Quayle," 26 May 1926, box 12, folder 106, Cutts Collection. At the time of his death on 21 February 1931, Capt Quayle was assigned to 9th Regiment, Central Reserve Area. See Company M, 9th Marine Regiment muster roll (MRoll), Central Reserve Area, 1 January 1931–30 June 1931, roll 0321, image 601, Ancestry.com.

[31] Following a series of additional patents, Cutts Compensator established a contract with Lyman to manufacture and sell shotgun compensators with changeable choke tubes. These were also generically known as Cutts Compensators and were commercially successful. However, they were intended for sporting use and are beyond the scope of this article.



Cutts Collection, box 30, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division
Taken by spark photography, this image shows gas escaping through the ventilating ports on the top of the compensator.

Compensator partners collected a royalty as negotiated in the contract for the sale of each compensator. As a result, none of the business partners engaged directly in the sale of firearms; rather, their interest was in motivating others to purchase compensators or guns with compensators attached.[32]

Toward Universal Adoption

The Cuttses followed several lines of effort while marketing their compensator. First, they would need to develop compensators for firearms already in U.S. or foreign arsenals. The principles behind the compensator could be universally applied to any weapon that produced recoil and muzzle climb on firing. As Cutts Jr. explained, "the Comp fits on anything that shoots," giving the device a diverse market.[33]

However, the Cuttses would have to tailor the design to match the recoil and climb produced by a specific model of firearm. This required intensive effort to develop, test, and refine the compensator paired with a weapon but ensured the widest availability to license the manufacture and sale of compensators. "What we want," Colonel Cutts wrote to his son in 1934, "is universal adoption" of the compensator.[34] Encouraging the military to purchase compensa-

[32] Cutts Jr. to Chief of Ordnance, War Department, "Cutts Compensator," 14 March 1935, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection.

[33] Cutts Jr. to John Young, 10 July 1936, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.

[34] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 19 April 1934, box 3, folder 13, Cutts Collection.

tors required them to demonstrate the value of the Cutts Compensator in cases where the military already had weapons to which they could be fitted. The father and son team developed compensators for a number of U.S. and foreign civilian and military arms ranging from small-caliber handguns to large-caliber artillery pieces.[35]

In 1926, Colonel Cutts authorized the U.S. Navy Bureau of Ordnance to freely use the patents in developing compensators for .50-caliber machine guns, 37mm guns, and other large-caliber weapons. Colonel Cutts offered to assist in testing to "obtain the maximum of balance and efficiency."[36] Despite the bureau's experiments and extensive offers by Colonel Cutts to bring about further development, there was no adoption of Cutts Compensators for large-caliber weapons or cannon.

In addition to large-caliber weapons, the Cuttses tried to persuade the U.S. military to adopt the compensator for small arms already in their possession. The BAR had already been adopted by the Marines and was a prime candidate for a recoil-reducing device. In 1928, the *Marine Corps Gazette* reported that the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Ben H. Fuller, authorized combat trials of 50 compensated BARs in Nicaragua with the 2d Marine Brigade.[37] Following the trials, Fuller approved the purchase of 500 compensators for the M1918 BAR in November 1930.[38] The purchase was delayed until funds could be appropriated, but the BAR compensators were never procured. A second board convened to reinvestigate the compensated BAR but recommended against its adoption. The test, conducted by Captain Merritt A. Edson in December 1931 and March 1932, compared a civilian Colt Monitor automatic rifle (which was sold fitted with a Cutts Compensator), a standard M1918 BAR, and a modified compensated BAR. While earlier evaluations relied on what Colonel Cutts described as "hit factor," or the number of hits on target per firer per minute, Edson followed no such criteria.[39] He measured effectiveness through hits on target compared to the number of rounds fired. Edson's chosen testing criteria was a means of measuring accuracy. He recommended against adopting the compensator, reporting that it failed "to control the rifle to the extent that it will be accurate when fired automatically by the average enlisted man."[40] The board's determination proved a major setback.

In April 1932, Bleasdale met with Edson in what he described as "just a weapons talk between a couple gun men." He informed Colonel Cutts that Edson conceded that the compensator reduced recoil on the BAR, but that "the advantages of the Comp does not make up for its additional weight, [and] length." Crucially, Bleasdale related Edson's feelings that the "escape of gas and flame through the apertures in the sides" of the compensator had a "tendency to annoy the shooter and those alongside of him."[41] Bleasdale's correspondence offers insight into the board's decision. By selecting a target range for the tests and positioning firers on line next to one another, the board created conditions to reject the compensated BAR. Cutts Jr. dismissed Edsons's tests, telling Bleasdale that if the compensators irritated a neighboring firer "then they are entirely too well bunched for combat conditions. . . . We know that all training is presumably for combat, so are we going to allow the tail to wag the dog? And consider that false conditions obtained on the rifle range have precedence?" Cutts Jr. asked.[42]

[35] The Cuttses developed compensators for a wide variety of arms domestically, ranging from a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver to a 105mm howitzer, among a multitude of others. Cutts to Cutts Jr., 11 November 1931, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection; and Cutts to MajGen Clarence C. Williams, 20 October 1929, box 16, folder 146, Cutts Collection.

[36] Cutts to Chief of Bureau of Ordnance, "Fitting of Compensator to 50 Caliber Machine Gun, 37 mm guns, and Guns of Greater Caliber," 15 November 1926, box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection.

[37] "Professional Notes," *Marine Corps Gazette* 13, no. 2 (June 1928): 147–56.

[38] MajGen Commandant to Cutts, "Cutts Compensator," 6 November 1930, box 16, folder 148, Cutts Collection.

[39] Cutts to the MajGen Commandant, "Cuban Arms," 4 October 1933, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection.

[40] For Edson's report, see reference (a) enclosed in Director, Division of Operations and Training to MajGen Commandant, "Report on Test of Colt 'Monitor' Automatic Machine Rifle, Caliber .30," 18 March 1932, box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection.

[41] Bleasdale to Cutts, 21 April 1932, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection.

[42] Cutts Jr. to Bleasdale, 28 May 1932, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection.

Despite the board's recommendation, the Marine Corps appears to have continued exploring the compensated BAR. A letter from Bleasdale suggests further combat use in Nicaragua. In April 1932, Bleasdale related to Colonel Cutts that "Lieut[enant] Tavern had a night contact in Nic[aragua] and states that the flames shooting from the sides of the BAR Comps blinded his BAR men."[43] The compensator's recoil-reducing porting may have proved annoying during Edson's tests, but in combat it also was revealed as a liability at night as it directed the muzzle flash rearward.

Although formal evaluation stalled, Colonel Cutts felt that "if the Marcorps [*sic*] decides to put on the BAR Comp, that they can be made by Lyman cheaper than the N.G.F. [Naval Gun Factory] and that Phila can put them on." Although Colonel Cutts took the compensator's manufacturing costs into consideration, he advised his son to "suppress any apparent eagerness for personal profit, I know this mans [*sic*] army."[44] Fearful that revealing public enthusiasm for their compensator might compromise further interest, Colonel Cutts counselled his son to remain cautious regarding the compensated BAR.[45]

Although the Cutts Compensator was included on the civilian BAR variant sold commercially by Colt as the Monitor, the compensated BAR was largely shelved as a project for the U.S. military. The Marine Corps revisited the compensated BAR during World War II on the recommendation of Cutts Jr., then a lieutenant colonel.[46] After trials in 1943, the Marine Corps Equipment Board recommended equipping the M1918A2 BAR with a Cutts Compensator. Despite the board's findings, it appears this recommendation was not carried out.[47]

Like the BAR, the Lewis machine gun had already been adopted by the military and could be modified to fit a compensator. The Cuttses persuaded the Navy to assist in refining their compensator's design for the Lewis gun before beginning trials. Developed in part by the Bureau of Aeronautics, the compensated Lewis gun saw field trials and, according to Colonel Cutts, combat use in Nicaragua. Although it was tested by Navy and Marine aircraft squadrons on free-mounted Lewis guns, neither organization chose to adopt the compensator.[48] In 1933, Ross E. Rowell gave the compensated Lewis gun a favorable review, stating that in Marine Observation Squadrons VO-6M and VO-7M "all gunners report much better service" with it. Rowell endorsed the compensated Lewis gun as "much steadier and [a] better group is had with the compensator."[49] Despite this endorsement, the Cuttses' efforts to stimulate adoption of a Lewis gun compensator failed.

In addition to supporting the adoption of compensators for weapons already in the U.S. inventory, the Cuttses explored compensator sales outside the

[43] Bleasdale to Cutts, 21 April 1932, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection. This may refer to J. J. Tavern, listed in a roster of officers sent to Nicaragua. See "News from Nicaragua," *Leatherneck*, October 1932, 22. To mitigate this issue, the Cuttses experimented with a shrouded compensator. Photographs of the flash-reducing shroud can be found in the Cutts Collection.

[44] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 3 October 1933, box 3, folder 13, Cutts Collection.

[45] A more complete discussion of the development of the compensated BAR and the Colt Monitor are beyond the scope of this article. For more on these weapons, see Cutts to Bleasdale, 25 March 1932, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection; Cutts Jr. to Young, 10 July 1936, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection; Cutts to the MajGen Commandant, "Cuban Arms," 4 October 1933, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection; and Cutts to Cutts Jr., 14 November 1930, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection.

[46] Cutts Jr. to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Compensators for Browning Automatic Rifle," 18 September 1943, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection.

[47] Minutes of Meeting of Marine Corps Equipment Board, 20 January 1944, box 16, folder 148, Cutts Collection.

[48] Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics to the Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, "Cutts' Compensator for Aircraft Machine Guns," 1 August 1927, box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection; "Abstract from Target Report of V.S. Squadron 2-B," box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection; and Cutts to the MajGen Commandant, "Cuban Arms," 4 October 1933, box 16, folder 145, Cutts Collection. An unsigned letter to Bleasdale states "on the steamer sailing from here about March 16th. will go fifty new Compensated Browning Automatics . . . as well as twenty Compensators for [Ross] Rowells Lewis aircraft guns." The letter was sent from Washington, DC, likely by Cutts Jr. while stationed there. See letter to Bleasdale, 27 February 1928, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection. Cutts Jr. felt the Navy's unfavorable remarks may have been the result of improper installation of the compensator. See Cutts Jr. to LtCmdr McFall, 2 December 1929, box 16, folder 147, Cutts Collection.

[49] Ross E. Rowell, "Weekly Operations News Letter, Week Ending 15 April, 1933," box folder 148, Cutts Collection.

United States. Intensive efforts to persuade the French to adopt a compensator for their automatic weapons failed. In the case of the Hotchkiss machine gun, the French determined that there was "no appreciable difference" when firing with a compensator.[50]

The Cutts Compensator partners also brought on agents in hopes of arranging foreign licensing or sales. By 1937, they had filed and maintained patents for the compensator in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland.[51] Dr. Fritz Neuhaus, formerly the general director of the Borsig locomotive manufacturing firm, worked as the agent of Cutts Compensator in Germany.[52] In 1935, Alfred A. Neuwald was authorized to "represent the interests of Cutts Compensator" in multiple additional countries across central and eastern Europe. As the enlistment of sales agents demonstrates, the Cutts Compensator partners had global ambitions for their device.[53]

Military Trials

Although trying to market compensators for a number of weapons already in American or foreign inventory, the Cuttses' primary effort was convincing the U.S. military to formally adopt the compensated Thompson submachine gun. This involved an aggressive campaign, much of which drifted between official channels and private business correspondence. A potentially compromising conflict of interest resulted for the Cutts Compensator partners as they worked toward adoption of the compensated Thompson in the Marine Corps and other Service branches.

Early on, Colonel Cutts adapted the compensator design to the Thompson gun and gave a firing demonstration to retired U.S. Army officer, inventor, and president of the Auto-Ordnance Corporation Colonel John Taliaferro Thompson. Colonels Thompson and Cutts quickly worked together so that Auto-Ordnance Corporation offered compensated Thompson submachine guns for sale.[54]

Following armed robberies of mail-laden railcars in 1926, contingents of Marines served as mail guards. As they had done in 1921, the Marine Corps protected U.S. mail in transit. This assignment presented an unusual situation. The Thompson submachine gun had debuted on the commercial market in the early 1920s and had become the weapon of choice for many gangsters.[55] The Marines, however, had no such weapons in their inventory. Fearing that gangsters armed with the rapid-fire Thompson guns might "outgun" the Marines, *Leatherneck* magazine reported that the postmaster general met with Colonels Thompson and Cutts in October 1926. Following a demonstration, the postmaster general reportedly ordered the purchase of 200 Thompsons equipped with Cutts Compensators for the Marines. This would ensure Marines acting as mail guards could at least equal any opponent in firepower.[56]

[50] Abner Y. Leech to Cutts Jr., 23 October 1935, box 6, folder 36, Cutts Collection. For further information on French trials, see Laurence V. Benet to A. Y. Leech Jr., 20 August 1935, box 6, folder 36, Cutts Collection; and Cutts Jr. to Laurence V. Benet, 19 September 1935, box 6, folder 36, Cutts Collection.

[51] William Seaver to G. Oberdick, 1 May 1937, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.

[52] *Hearings Before the Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry, U.S. Senate, 73d Cong., pursuant to S. Res. 206, pt. 13* (17 December 1934) (testimony of Lt Richard Malcolm Cutts on the relationship between War and Navy Departments and American Inventors), 3568–69, hereafter Cutts Testimony; Cutts Jr. to Walter B. Ryan, 21 February 1931, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection; and Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Modern World, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 93.

[53] Neuwald was authorized in the following countries: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Italy. See Memorandum, 27 April 1935, box 11, folder 90, Cutts Collection.

[54] Cutts to Moorefield, 22 October 1926, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection; and "Preliminary Agreement between the Auto Ordnance Corporation of New York and Colonel R.M. Cutts U.S.M.C. Concerning the Use of the Cutts Compensator on Guns for the Auto Ordnance Corporation," 14 January 1927, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.

[55] "Marine Corps Mail Guards Carry Improved Machine Gun," *Leatherneck*, December 1926, 44. For examples of law enforcement and gangster use of the Thompson, see Roger A. Cox, *The Thompson Submachine Gun* (Athens, GA: Law Enforcement Ordnance, 1982).

[56] "Marine Corps Mail Guards Carry Improved Machine Gun," *Leatherneck*, December 1926, 44; and Hill, *Thompson*, 89. The 1926 report of the secretary of the Navy states that "in addition to their usual arms and equipment," Marine mail guards "were provided with riot shotguns and a limited number of Thompson machine guns." *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year, 1926* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, Government Printing Office, 1927), 51. For information regarding Marine service as mail guards, see Merrill L. Bartlett, "John A. Lejeune, 1920–1929," in *Commandants of the Marine Corps*, ed. Allan R. Millet and Jack Shulimson (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 202–8.

Cutts Collection, box 31, Historical Resources Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Testing the compensated Lewis machine gun.

It was an unusual situation for the Marines in several respects. The Marines found themselves equipped with a weapon prior to it having been formally evaluated or adopted. "No one sold the gun to [the] U.S.M.C.," Cutts Jr. wrote, "it was merely introduced."[57] As Colonel Cutts explained it, the Thompson had "no real official status" but had been "horned in" to service to meet a perceived mission need.[58] Outside the Marine Corps, the Thompson submachine gun was formally tested by several U.S. Army boards, but the boards had not approved the gun for adoption.[59] Rather than being equipped after the Army or Navy had already adopted a weapon, the Marine Corps found itself ahead of the other Services with the latest development in small arms.

While the gun served its purpose for the Marine mail guards, Colonel Cutts and his son wanted to "give the gun a trial on the trails" in Nicaragua.[60] They felt that combat testing rather than a range evaluation was the only means of demonstrating the full potential of

[57] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 14 June 1935, box 2, folder 8, Cutts Collection.
[58] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 8 November 1929, folder 12, Cutts Collection.

[59] The Air Service tested the Thompson in 1921. See Hill, *Thompson*, 44–45. Similarly, Springfield Armory and the Infantry Board tested the Thompson in 1922; the Air Service conducted additional evaluations of the Thompson in 1924. See Iannamico, *American Thunder*, 14–20.
[60] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 17 November 1932, box box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection.

the compensated Thompson.[61] To accomplish this, the Cuttses, in coordination with other parties, orchestrated a publicity campaign designed to inspire interest in the compensated Thompson and press for its adoption. In a telling letter from Cutts Jr. to the president of Auto-Ordnance, he boasted that they had utilized "an active agent" to advocate for the compensated Thompson and give firing demonstrations. After "an intensive effort" the agent was successful in bringing "the necessary high ranking officers around to his point of view." The agent involved was Victor Bleasdale, then a Marine captain and a partner in Cutts Compensator. "The playing up of the gun in the reports was not accidental," Cutts Jr. wrote. "True, the gun did its stuff—but so did the other weapons."[62] By Cutts Jr.'s own account, Bleasdale's demonstrations and reporting played a crucial role in publicizing and highlighting the qualities of the compensated Thompson.

Bleasdale's involvement with the Thompson gun was more complicated than portrayed by Cutts Jr. Prior to the development of the Cutts Compensator, Bleasdale evaluated the Thompson gun. In March 1925, he recommended it for adoption as an auxiliary weapon for machine gun and artillery sections. He felt that the weapon's high rate of fire could be used to defend against rushing enemy forces. Bleasdale's support for the Thompson gun predated his partnership with the Cuttses in the Cutts Compensator business.[63]

After joining the compensator partnership, Bleasdale maintained his support for the Thompson gun. In a 1928 report covering the Thompson's performance during the Nueva Segovia Expedition in Nicaragua, Bleasdale described the Thompson as "one of the most powerful weapons with which infantry troops can be armed." He validated this claim based on the Thompson gun's large magazine capacity, stopping power, and high rate of fire. However, it was "the Cutts Compensator with which the Thompson is equipped" that made the "weapon easier to control . . . and which eliminates much of the erratic firing."[64] Bleasdale now expressed his view that the compensator was critical to making the capabilities of the Thompson functional in a combat environment. Its crucial role as represented in this report underscores Cutts Jr.'s later claim about "playing up" the Thompson. A subsequent article by Bleasdale in the *Marine Corps Gazette* recapped the Neuva Segovia operation. Bleasdale publicly reiterated his position, asserting that the compensator "enables the firer to get on his target and stay on it easier than when firing a Thompson without a Cutt's [*sic*] compensator."[65] Cutts Jr. presented a scenario in which the success of the compensated Thompson was largely orchestrated by Bleasdale, an invested member of the Cutts Compensator organization.

Bleasdale was not alone in pushing the compensated Thompson gun within military circles. Colonel Cutts engaged in this activity as well. Writing to Auto-Ordnance, Colonel Cutts reported that he had "worked" the compensated Thompson "into a report on advanced base work."[66] For Colonel Cutts, the compensated Thompson gun often found itself within the context of advanced base doctrine and the unique mission of the Marine Corps. Writing from his post at the Naval War College, Colonel Cutts informed Bleasdale that "the Compensator business is based on the landing force and fire effect on seizing and capturing Advanced Bases, everything else is secondary." In addition to being a specially trained force, Colonel Cutts felt the Marine Corps must be a specially equipped one. Part of this equipment had to be capable of delivering the maximum possible firepower to ensure a successful landing against a defended shore-

[61] Both Cuttses refuted unfavorable evaluations of the compensator as resulting from conditions imposed by range testing rather than combat trials. See Cutts Jr. to Bleasdale, 28 May 1932, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection; and Cutts to Pickett, 23 April 1932, box 16, folder 148, Cutts Collection. Col Cutts contended that the compensator for the M1903 Springfield rifle was designed for "field service effects and not the range." See Cutts, "Memorandum for Chief of Cavalry," 12 September 1927, box 16, folder 146, Cutts Collection.

[62] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 17 November 1932, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection.

[63] "Report on the Thompson Submachine Gun," 11 March 1925, Ordnance Section, 1925 Thompson Report folder, National Museum of the Marine Corps.

[64] Victor Bleasdale, "Thompson Submarine [*sic*] Guns," 18 January 1928, photocopy of report, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection.

[65] Capt Victor F. Bleasdale, "La Flor Engagement," *Marine Corps Gazette* 16, no. 4 (February 1932): 40.

[66] Cutts to Thompson, 28 April 1928, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.

line.[67] "Unfortunately," Colonel Cutts agonized, "most of our training has been had on the Army basis . . . we do not visualize the use of special equipment for special Landing Force Operations."[68] To Colonel Cutts, the compensated Thompson offered a viable solution to the Marine Corps' firepower needs.

As the Marine Corps prepared a board to formally evaluate the compensated Thompson in 1929, Colonel Cutts remained stationed in Haiti. Because he was unable to attend the board, Cutts Jr. demonstrated the compensator and the gun. Writing from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Colonel Cutts advised his son how to present the compensated Thompson before the Marine Corps Board. "You should place it in the fire fight at short range. . . . Your tone throughout should be field and battle conditions." In selling the role of the Thompson to the board, Colonel Cutts stressed to his son that he must "BLAME IT ALL on the conditions of a landing under fire, THE M.C. [Marine Corps] job by the WAR PLANS."[69] The compensated Thompson was to be exhibited in the format most favorable to a Marine Corps board. This was done by a Marine with financial interest in the adoption of the weapon rather than a civilian representative of Auto-Ordnance.

While Colonel Cutts advocated for the compensated Thompson's use during amphibious assaults, he contended it had other applications as well. It could be employed successfully in other combat environments including night fighting, patrolling, convoy operations, urban warfare, jungle warfare, and virtually every offensive or defensive environment imaginable. Additionally, Colonel Cutts argued that the Thompson gun could be used by forces other than the Marines that had special requirements. "Engineers, signal troops, etc.," cavalry, and artillery forces could all benefit from the high volume of fire the compact Thompson could provide.[70]

With such wide applications in mind, Colonel Cutts employed various methods to ensure that the compensated Thompson was well-known to those inside and outside the Marine Corps. Subtly, he waged a publicity campaign in favor of the compensated Thompson. He used professional journals to ensure readers knew about the weapon.[71] Colonel Cutts maintained a stock of Auto-Ordnance catalogs at the Naval War College to disseminate.[72] Cutts Jr. encouraged Auto-Ordnance to advertise in the publications of the Marine Corps Association after he became the secretary-treasurer.[73] Quayle published his findings on the Cutts Compensator in *Army Ordnance*.[74] As previously discussed, Bleasdale praised the compensator in the *Marine Corps Gazette*. The Cutts Compensator partners leveraged professional journals and their positions to sway opinion in favor of the compensated Thompson.

Initially humanized as the "Thompson," the submachine gun's popular name changed for marketing purposes. Following a demonstration of the compensated Thompson for police officers at Camp Perry, Ohio, Colonel Thompson wrote to Colonel Cutts that the police officers started calling the gun the "Tommy." He felt that "this might be a good word for it among the Marines, as a simple name like that goes a good way to popularize a piece of equipment."[75] Even the popular sobriquet "Tommy gun" was recognized as

[67] Cutts to Bleasdale, 23 April 1932, box 12, folder 107, Cutts Collection; and "Memorandum. Concerning certain fire effects required by Naval Forces in Shore Operations," box 29, folder 242, Cutts Collection.
[68] Cutts to Pickett, 23 April 1923, box 16, folder 148, Cutts Collection.
[69] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 8 November 1929, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection.
[70] Cutts to Colonel C. S. Hill, 25 February 1927, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection. See also Cutts, "The Cavalry Fire Fight as Affected by the Cutts Compensator," box 29, folder 242, Cutts Collection.
[71] Cutts also published in Marine Corps journals. See Col R. M. Cutts, "The Cutts Compensator," *Marine Corps Gazette* 11, no. 4 (December 1926): 249–51; and Col Richard M. Cutts, "The Cutts Compensator," *Leatherneck*, February 1929, 10–11. See also Philip P. Quayle, "The Cutts Compensator," *Leatherneck*, April 1927, 12–14. For a discussion of using the *Army and Navy Journal* to influence the Navy, see Cutts to Thompson, 31 March 1928, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection. Cutts also mentioned a recent publication of his in the *Cavalry Journal*. See Cutts to Thompson, 28 April 1928, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.
[72] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 17 November 1932, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection. This issue surfaced during Cutts Jr.'s Senate testimony. See Cutts Testimony, 3547.
[73] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 8 April 1933, box 3, folder 12, Cutts Collection.
[74] Philip P. Quayle, "The Cutts Compensator," *Army Ordnance*, March–April 1927.
[75] Thompson to Cutts, 24 September 1929, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.

an opportunity to increase the demand for the submachine gun among the Marines.[76]

The psychological campaign extended into the U.S. Army's tests of the compensated Thompson. Prior to the start of the trials, Colonel Cutts wrote to Colonel Thompson instructing him on how to conduct the Army tests. Once the Army had been "engineered into a demonstration," the Marine Corps' use of the Thompson was to be downplayed or even ignored altogether. Colonel Cutts informed Colonel Thompson that the Army must "be permitted to discover . . . that the gun is eminently suited to their needs." Despite having been present with Colonel Thompson in the meeting with the postmaster general and numerous other demonstrations, Colonel Cutts chose not to attend the Army trials. He felt the Army evaluation should be conducted without a Marine present. "Face MUST be saved by original discovery," Cutts told Thompson, so that the Army was "permitted [to] rediscover" the Thompson on their own "and adopt it as their own child."[77] Colonel Cutts later echoed this advice during the Cavalry Board's testing of the compensated Thompson. Writing to Walter Ryan, then the president of Auto-Ordnance, he explained that "the psychological idea is to permit the outfit to consider that they have developed the [Thompson] sub [machine gun] entirely on their own and to them belongs the persipicacity [*sic*] of discovering its great usefulness." Colonel Cutts remained sensitive to the human element present when testing and evaluating new technologies. His remarks to Colonel Thompson and Walter Ryan expose his insight into the potential influence his uniform could have in shaping a board's decision.[78]

Ultimately, the Navy ordered 500 Thompsons in 1928. Each of the U.S. Navy Model 1928 Thompsons came equipped with a Cutts Compensator. The Army proved slower to act, authorizing the compensated Model 1928 Thompson only for limited procurement following the Cavalry Board's trials. Despite the slow start, the compensated Thompson formally found its way into the hands of American servicemembers.[79]

Writing to the president of Auto-Ordnance Corporation in 1932, Cutts Jr. summarized his role. "Now, I believe that you understand how our interests are linked with yours and that we are more than just inventors drawing a royalty," Cutts Jr. stated. Although they "could lie back and draw our royalty . . . without raising a finger," both Cuttses took a more active role in promoting the compensated Thompson submachine gun. Working from behind the scenes, Cutts Jr. felt they "really almost acted as directors in many ways" to bring about sales of the compensated Thompson.[80]

Seeking Sales and Senate Scrutiny

As a result of their invention, Colonel Cutts and his son established connections to prominent salesmen, manufacturers, and distributors. Over the years, they coordinated to stimulate sales of compensated Thompsons. Moving beyond interests in Thompson guns alone, they tried to arrange, recommend, or act as intermediaries to orchestrate the sale of various weapons.

These relationships drew the attention of the Senate Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry. The committee formed in 1934 and was led by Senator Gerald P. Nye (R-ND). The Nye committee investigated allegations of war profiteering by munitions manufacturers and those in the arms industry. Strongly isolationist in its orientation, the committee inquired into munitions industry responsibility for American entry into World War I and investigated the sales practices of the arms industry.[81]

Cutts Compensator was summoned by the Nye committee to testify. As Colonel Cutts was then de-

[76] Elsewhere, Paul Fussell recognized the value attained by humanizing weapons. See Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 266–67.
[77] Cutts to Thompson, 3 October 1929, box 2, folder 6, Cutts Collection.
[78] Cutts to Ryan, 2 September 1931, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection.
[79] Hill, *Thompson*, 103, 195–96.
[80] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 12 April 1932, box 2, folder 7, Cutts Collection.
[81] Stuart D. Brandes, *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 199–225; Paul A. C. Koistinen, "The 'Industrial-Military Complex' in Historical Perspective: The Inter-War Years," *Journal of American History* 56, no. 4 (March 1970): 819–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/1917520; and John Edward Wiltz, "The Nye Committee Revisited," *Historian* 23, no. 2 (February 1961): 211–33.

ceased, Cutts Jr. remained to testify regarding the partners' conduct. Questioned by Missouri senator Bennett Champ Clark, then-first lieutenant Cutts Jr. was scrutinized over his simultaneous role as inventor and Marine. Cutts Jr. readily defended his actions. Cutts Jr. informed the senator that following developmental work and the submission of their first patent, the Cutts Compensator inventors offered the patent to the Navy so that it could be "placed in the secret archives." This offer came at no cost and included no royalties or other compensation for the Cuttses. The Navy, however, expressed no interest in funding the development of their antirecoil or anticlimb device. That the Navy Department failed to fully exploit the willing contributions of those in uniformed service left Senator Clark little room to criticize Cutts Jr. as an inventor. The senator shifted his next line of questioning to the conflicted role of businessman and Marine.[82]

Senator Clark honed in on Cutts Jr.'s dual role, pointedly challenging him about his collection of royalties and involvement in promoting the compensated Thompson as a Marine officer. Cutts Jr. denied wrongdoing, asserting that no law or regulation prohibited an active duty officer from running a business. Clark challenged the partners' ability to separate their business from their professional duties. To illustrate the routine muddling of professional and private spheres, Clark noted during the inquiry the regular use of official Marine Corps letterhead in mail relating to Cutts Compensator business matters. Moving beyond the Cuttses, Clark confronted Cutts Jr. on Bleasdale's involvement with the Cutts Compensator business. He focused on Bleasdale's favorable reports about the compensated Thompson. Cutts Jr. evaded the issue by explaining that Bleasdale was a partner, not a sales agent. That Bleasdale collected a royalty was not lost on Clark, whatever position Bleasdale may have held.[83]

Senator Clark also inquired about attempts to initiate sales of small arms abroad. Despite intensive questioning, the committee was unable to uncover any successful sales in which Cutts Jr. or a partner in Cutts Compensator received a sales commission for weapons. Despite this, Clark determined that the partners at "the compensator company received the royalty from the Auto-Ordnance Company . . . which they, in turn, turned over to the partners of the [Cutts] compensator company." "The compensator," Clark felt, "was one additional step" to collect a commission on the sale of guns. Although Cutts Compensator never directly sold guns, its partners encouraged the sale of compensated guns. In advocating for sales, Clark insisted that they abused their roles as military officers. Clark implied that Cutts Jr.'s actions were those of an unscrupulous businessman who prioritized profit over his duties as a Marine.[84]

In contrast, Cutts Jr. saw himself as not having crossed any ethical boundaries. In a letter penned following his Senate testimony, Cutts Jr. faulted the Nye committee because it "could not differentiate between guns and Compensators." In his view, the committee "tried to prove that we were peddling guns!"[85] As Cutts Jr. understood it, the Navy's dismissal of their design enabled him to engage in commercial sales. As a private enterprise, he did not perceive the coordination by Marine officers to encourage the adoption of the compensated Thompson as a conflict of interest. Nor did he see the promotion of foreign compensator sales as unethical. Despite Senator Clark's more solidly drawn boundary between private enterprise and professional duties, Cutts Jr. did not believe he or his fellow Marine officers had acted unethically.

Assessing the Cuttses

As Senator Clark alluded to, the Cutts Compensator partners could be seen as acting out of self-interest when they advocated adoption of the Thompson gun bearing their compensator. They may be viewed as entrepreneurial profit seekers who abused their positions for personal gain. In contrast, they could be

[82] Cutts Testimony, 3544–45; and Cutts Jr. to Secretary of the Navy, "Patent Application for Improvement on Fire Arms," July 1925, box 11, folder 89, Cutts Collection.

[83] Cutts Testimony, 3544–45.

[84] Cutts Testimony, 3543–76.

[85] Cutts Jr. to Ed [Crossman?], 4 March 1935, box 3, folder 14, Cutts Collection.

viewed as innovators attempting to overcome bureaucratic inertia who believed that the compensator was a necessary piece of special equipment to ensure the success of an amphibious assault. In this case, were their actions those of dedicated professionals who tenaciously pursued what they believed to be best for the Corps? These nagging questions run through the complex narrative of the Cuttses and their invention.

While Cutts Jr. vehemently denied any attempts at "peddling guns," his correspondence indicates that he sought more than just the adoption of the Thompson in the United States or compensator sales in Europe. Frequently vague in his business dealings, Cutts Jr. often chose not to disclose the intended purchasers in sales he sought to orchestrate. In 1935, Cutts Jr. wrote to Walter Ryan regarding a manufacturing license in Poland, but he stated he was "not at liberty to disclose the names of the principals involved." Cutts Jr. asked that Ryan keep "the entire matter [in the] dark."[86] In correspondence with John Young of Federal Laboratories, a supplier of Auto-Ordnance-manufactured Thompson guns, Cutts Jr. hinted at potential sales to a "Persian outfit." Deliberately secretive, with concerns about being double-crossed, Cutts Jr. felt that in either case "the path is left open to you, and you can land the deal with us in the background."[87] Cutts Jr. alluded to arranging weapons sales to foreign buyers.

While unclear, Cutts Jr.'s correspondence includes letters that point to completed sales. In 1932, Cutts Jr. wrote to Young with a quote for refurbished 75-foot boats. The boats in question did not come equipped with guns. "If you so desire, I ca[n] arrange for these also. Perhaps you want each one fitted with a 37mm. and a .50 cal. machine gun?" Cutts Jr. wrote. To let Young know he could handle this sale, Cutts Jr. assured him, "We are in an excellent position to take care of you on this job, having just delivered two boats to another country farther away than Cuba."[88]

[86] Cutts Jr. to Ryan, 3 April 1935, box 2, folder 8, Cutts Collection.
[87] Cutts Jr. to John W. Young, 31 December 1932, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.
[88] Cutts Jr. to John W. Young, 7 March 1934, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.

Despite the offer, Young declined because the price was too high. Yet, Cutts Jr.'s assurances indicate completed transactions. Whether he inflated his business experience or not, he intentionally portrayed himself and appeared as an active businessman with a global clientele.[89]

Cutts Jr. also tried working his way into the "airplane bomb business" with Young. The proposition would mean "thousands of dollars for your company" and would "evolve into a beautiful working combination in S.A. [South America] to the practical exclusion of all European competition." Cutts Jr. explained to Young how he fit in: "I wished to be associated with you . . . [and] I can see many ways where this association would work to our mutual advantage." However, Cutts Jr. could not "accept a salary from your company due to the fact that I am in the Service . . . [but] the best solution seems to be a question of treasury stock."[90] Although prohibited from accepting a direct monetary payment, Cutts Jr. was willing to work around this restriction to receive payment by other means.

The Cuttses, and by extension Bleasdale and Quayle, could easily be characterized as military officers exploiting their positions for personal financial gain. Cutts Jr.'s previously discussed correspondence with Federal Laboratories certainly points this way. However, further scrutiny provides a more complicated story and highlights for historians the ethical boundaries the Cuttses formed through their actions. As previously discussed, the initial patents were offered to the Navy but rejected. Colonel Cutts later freely authorized the use of his patents by the U.S. military for large-caliber weapons already in inventory. As these instances demonstrate, understanding the Cuttses requires greater nuance than merely depicting them as greedy profiteers.

Furthermore, malicious characterizations fail to perceive the limitations the Cuttses imposed on their business efforts. A terse exchange between father and son highlights the ethical boundaries Colonel Cutts established. Writing to his father in October 1933, Cutts Jr. discussed the potential to compensate submachine guns for sale to Cuba. With sales of Thompsons from Auto-Ordnance below expectations, Cutts Jr. felt this would be "an excellent opportunity to place the compensator on the world market." Cuban sales could help to "hasten our other foreign developments" and bring the expected purchases they had not received from the U.S. military.[91]

Colonel Cutts quickly responded; he would not allow any sales to Cuba. "It does not make any difference son, what the foreign developments are in the

Color poster [513920], "Back the Attack!," World War II Posters, 1942–45, Records of the Office of Government Reports, 1932–47, RG 44, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD
The Cutts Compensator became a recognizable feature on the Thompson submachine gun.

[89] John W. Young to Cutts Jr., 14 March 1934, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.
[90] Cutts Jr. to John W. Young, 30 March 1934, box 20, folder 175, Cutts Collection.
[91] Cutts Jr. to Cutts, 2 October 1933, box 3, folder 13, Cutts Collection.

Comp," he wrote. If sold to Cuba, the compensator would "deliberately raise the fire power of a possible opponent," Colonel Cutts contended. He emphatically declared that compensated guns "must NOT meet our forces in Cuba." Clearly, Colonel Cutts believed in the claims they made about their device. He viewed the compensator as highly effective and capable of greatly impacting the outcome of engagements. "Candidly," Cutts told his son, "I would expect to be court martialed, it is as bad as that." Colonel Cutts revealed his feelings that others might perceive their actions as unethical, if not outright illegal. He restrained his son by telling him not to "let us lose our perspectives." An ethical code, formed in practice by Colonel Cutts, provided the "balance" he had "been striving for" throughout their work. Pulled between the pursuits of businessmen and the responsibilities of Marine officers, Colonel Cutts felt he had found equilibrium between his contested roles. True, they sought the widespread adoption of the compensator, as evidenced by their activities within the Marine Corps and other branches of Service. They filed patents overseas, enlisted the aid of sales agents, and actively offered the compensator for testing to several foreign militaries. However, he would not allow their device to fall into the hands of those he believed may one day be enemies of the United States in exchange for profits. Here was the ethical boundary he formed. He would not allow his son to cross the line he created or tip the balance in favor of business pursuits.[92]

In mapping the Cuttses' ethics, the question of the effectiveness of the compensator necessarily arises. Many inventors eagerly marketed products of questionable utility to the U.S. military. However, the Cuttses should not be oversimplified as purveyors of a technological snake-oil cure for the ailments of automatic weapons. They went to extensive lengths to develop, test, and refine their compensators. The inclusion of Quayle in their partnership due to his scientific knowledge and his complex testing apparatus support this assertion. Colonel Cutts experimented extensively with the material for the compensator and its design, another indication that he did not consider the device cheap or superfluous.[93] As discussed previously, Colonel Cutts rebuked his son at the suggestion of Cuban sales. Here, the shared perception of the compensator as a decisive tool in military engagements is made clear. All evidence indicates they believed in the claims they made about their device.

Yet, the compensator found its way onto relatively few weapons despite the potential for widespread use. In *The Evolution of Technology*, George Basalla asserts that "when an invention is selected for development, we cannot assume that the initial choice is a unique and obvious one dictated by the nature of the artifact."[94] In the case of weapons development, the Thompson submachine gun could be perceived as the next logical step in weapons technology. However, this view ignores the critical role of Colonel Cutts and his son in agitating for the adoption of the Thompson gun. Nor should one assume that the Cutts Compensator inherently represented a technological improvement.[95]

Evaluations of the compensator for the Lewis gun, BAR, and Thompson produced both favorable and unfavorable reviews. These evaluations expose that testing, whether in laboratories, on target ranges, or in combat, was a highly subjective enterprise. Underlying Edson's evaluation of the compensated BAR was a belief in the tactical primacy of accuracy over volume of fire. His evaluation criteria relied on hits per target rather than taking into account the duration of fire. Edson's report dismissed automatic fire

[92] Cutts to Cutts Jr., 3 October 1933, box 3, folder 13, Cutts Collection.

[93] In a letter to Remington Arms Company, Col Cutts stated, "In all compensator work I prefer to use a special steel made by the Central Alloy Stell [*sic*] Co of Massillon Ohio. and this has been standardized with their assistance. It is a Chrome manganese Molybdendum alloy, and very machineable . . . [and] in its annealed state are ample for all small arms work." See Cutts to Remington Arms Company, 1 September 1927, box 6, folder 46, Cutts Collection.

[94] George Basalla, *The Evolution of Technology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 141.

[95] Similarly, author C. J. Chivers rejects perceptions of "orderly deliberation" involved in weapons procurement. C. J. Chivers, *The Gun* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 296. Others have seen technological improvements as a hindrance to military adoption. John Ellis has argued that the conservative nature of militaries leads them to dismiss rather than adopt new technologies. John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, reprint (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

Photo by SSgt W. Huntington, [175539297], Okinawa 658–143 Surrender, Photographs of World War II and Post World War II Marine Corps Activities, ca. 1939–ca. 1958, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, RG 127, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
Marines armed with compensated (left) and uncompensated (right) Thompson submachine guns guard Japanese prisoners on Okinawa, 3 September 1945.

because of inaccuracy and recommended that the BAR "should habitually be fired semi-automatically instead of full automatically."[96] This feedback contrasts sharply with the Cuttses' assertions about the increased "hit factor" provided by the compensator.

Bleasdale's reflections on the 1928 La Flor engagement reached a similar conclusion regarding the criticality of volume of fire. Bleasdale argued that "men must be taught to realize that 100 yards is the maximum battlefield range at which the average man armed with a shoulder weapon can deliberately aim and hit a man on the other side. . . . Even then the target must be motionless, large and distinct, with excellent visibility."[97] Thus, compensated automatic weapons provided a distinct tactical advantage due to their high volume of fire. The underlying disagreement between the Cuttses and Marines such as Edson point to the necessity of contextualization to understand the perpetuation or abandonment of a given military technology. In this case, a board's conclusions hinged on complex factors such as the construction of evaluation criteria, chosen testing conditions, and beliefs about the tactical role of a weapon. All of these rest outside a technical consideration of the compensator itself.

Although the compensator did not flourish as the Cuttses had hoped, the perceived utility of the device ensured imitators found their way onto other

[96] For Edson's report, see reference (a) enclosed in Director, Division of Operations and Training to MajGen Commandant, "Report on Test of Colt 'Monitor' Automatic Machine Rifle, Caliber .30."

[97] Bleasdale, "La Flor Engagement," 31.

Photo by Capt Horton, © IWM H 2645, War Office Second World War Official Collection, Imperial War Museums, London
Prime Minister Winston Churchill examines the Cutts Compensator on a Thompson submachine gun, 31 July 1940.

weapons. In one case, the Harrington and Richardson Arms Company manufactured the Model 50 Reising submachine gun with a gas-directing muzzle device. Following a lawsuit filed by Auto-Ordnance in 1942, Harrington and Richardson denied infringement but settled with Cutts Jr. for $17,500.[98] Whether necessary or superfluous in actuality, the presence of imitation compensators indicate that for some weapon developers, compensated guns were viewed as more desirable than uncompensated ones.

Ultimately, the Cutts Compensator–equipped Thompson submachine gun saw widespread service, finding its way into the hands of U.S. servicemembers, law enforcement officers, and gangsters. Eventually, simplified models removed "the Comp" from the Thompson submachine gun. Although absent from later-model Thompson guns, through the Lend-Lease program and foreign sales, compensated Thompsons saw military use around the world. As a result, the Cuttses' energetic appeals for the compensated Thompson impacted more than the U.S. military. Their compensator became a conspicuous feature on one of the most recognizable American small arms.

Colonel Cutts and Brigadier General Cutts Jr. developed their device and saw it successfully integrated into service due to their efforts at popularizing the Thompson submachine gun and driving home the criti-

[98] "Re: Harrington & Richardson Compensator for Reising Gun," 28 May 1941, box 2, folder 9, Cutts Collection; Affidavit of William E. Seaver, Maguire Industries Inc. and Richard Cutts Jr. v. Harrington and Richardson Arms Company, box 19, folder 172, Cutts Collection; and Affidavit of Richard M. Cutts, Maguire Industries Inc. and Richard Cutts Jr. v. Harrington and Richardson Arms Company, box 19, folder 172, Cutts Collection.

cal necessity of the compensator. Both father and son, assisted by fellow officers, utilized their positions in the Marine Corps to further the adoption of the compensated Thompson gun within the U.S. military and collected on the royalties gained by sales of their compensators. Their extensive personal correspondence exposes their conflicted identities and highlights the critical role they played in pressing for procurement of a new weapon. It reveals the ethical boundaries they defined while balancing the simultaneous positions they held as Marines, inventors, and business partners. The story of the Cutts Compensator is one of inventive design, intelligent planning, and capable execution undergirded by an ethical code that frequently merged private enterprise and professional duties. Theirs is a case study that invites scholars to historicize professional ethics to better understand the Marine Corps' past.

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