

## **Deploying Firearms in the Jesuit Missions of Río de la Plata: South America during the 17-18th Centuries**

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This article explores how members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) deployed various types of firearms in the settlement complex they created for Guaraní Indians, called “Missions” or “Reductions,” under Spanish rule from 1609-1767. Located in the Río de la Plata region (in present day southwestern Paraguay, northeastern Argentina, southern Brazil, and Uruguay), the main purpose of these missions was to spread Christianity among local inhabitants. The close proximity between the Jesuit-Guaraní Missions in Spanish territory and Portuguese Brazil caused continuous invasions of Portuguese slave and fortune hunters from São Paulo, called Bandeirantes, particularly during the decades of 1620 to 1630. In order to protect their flock of sheep from the attack of ferocious wolves, the Jesuits devised a means of self-defense by force of arms.

The first section of this article describes the historical development of the discussion among the Jesuits concerning countermeasures against the Bandeirantes. The general assembly of Jesuit Paraguayan Province adopted a resolution to permit armed opposition to the Portuguese slave hunters. The second section examines the arguments of the Society’s upper ranks in Rome, who found the general resolution of Paraguayan Province difficult to accept. Several instructions from the Society’s Superior General showed anxiety over the Province’s radical stance. However, the Paraguayan Jesuits were consistent in their commitment to take up arms for self-defense. Disobeying the instructions from Rome, the Jesuits in the Río de la Plata began training their Indians charges in European military techniques, implementing defensive measures in the Missions, and amassing various types of military equipment by different means.

The main objective of this article is to reconstruct the specific manner by which the Jesuits secured military equipment through an integrated analysis of multiple historical documents. In conclusion, this article demonstrates the following three points. (1) The Spanish Governor in Asunción, the present capital of Paraguay, sent firearms on several occasions. (2) The Paraguayan Jesuits themselves purchased weapons by using their own money. (3) The Jesuits also built several forges in the Missions in order to produce firearms, and received Spanish specialists who taught Guaraní Indians how to make different types of weapons. This is the outcome of the collective involvement of the Jesuits in the Río de la Plata.