

Transfer of Anadarko Army National Guard Armory 6 August 2015

Heritage of the Anadarko Armory – Colonel David W. Brown (Retired), Executive Director, 45th Infantry Division Museum, 2145 NE 36th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73111

Anadarko, Oklahoma, has a long and honored tradition of National Guard service with a history that began in 1918. Company L, Second Oklahoma Infantry Regiment was formed in the summer of 1918 while the First World War raged in Europe. In July 1921, the Anadarko unit was re-organized into a horse-drawn artillery unit known as Battery E of the 160th Field Artillery Regiment.

The United States was poorly prepared for World War I and after the war, took aggressive steps to improve its military and especially its National Guard units. In 1921, the 45th Infantry Division was created by combining the National Guard units of Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona into one cohesive unit with its Headquarters in Oklahoma City. The shoulder patch of the 45th Infantry Division was a yellow swastika worn on a square background of red. The swastika was a Native American good luck symbol that represented the strong Native American heritage of the 45th Infantry Division. Each side of the square patch represented one of the four states, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona whose units comprised the 45th Infantry Division. The colors of gold and red represented the Spanish heritage of the four states.

Because of the large population of Native Americans in the four states that comprised the National Guard's 45th Infantry Division, a significant percentage of the Division's soldiers came from the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Apache, Sioux, Kiowa, Pawnee, Comanche, Osage, Creek, and Navajo tribes, to name but a few of the over fifty Native American tribes represented in the Division. No other Division, before or after the Second World War had more Native Americans in its ranks than the 45th Infantry Division.

In those days, most Oklahoma Army National Guard units met in schools and other public buildings. They rented the upper floors of downtown buildings for the storage of their equipment and trained in the open fields outside of the community. The Anadarko unit, like many other Oklahoma Army National Guard units, desperately needed a building dedicated to meet their training and equipment storage needs. However, during the Great Depression, local communities and the State of Oklahoma were unable to fund the construction of these armories. Construction of National Guard armories then became a priority for the Federal Government. The Works Projects Administration, or the WPA as it came to be known, was established in 1935 by President Roosevelt, as part of his New Deal, to create work for thousands of unemployed men.

On 7 October 1935, the City of Anadarko deeded the land we are standing on to the State of Oklahoma for the purpose of building a National Guard armory. Construction began in 1937 and the Armory was completed in 1938. One of 51 armories built by the WPA in Oklahoma, the Anadarko Armory was built to look like military castle battlements by the use of parapets, arched entryways, and false towers at the corners. Inside was a huge central drill hall with a spacious stage located one end. A state of the art modern rifle and pistol target range was built under the stage with bullet-proof side chambers provided for scorers and observers. Supply rooms, motor pools, and administrative offices completed the armory.

In 1938, it was a different world from what we know today. National Guard privates were paid twelve dollars every three months plus a dollar a day for the two week long summer camp. Sergeants and officers were paid a little more. The nation's unemployment rate was 19%. The minimum hourly wage was 25 cents. The average hourly wage was 40 cents for a 44 hour working week. Orson Wells' dramatization of the "War of the World" radio program story caused panic throughout the nation. Walt Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" was showing in movie theaters. Howard Hughes set a new aviation record by flying around the world in only

three days and 19 hours. Oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia and the cost of gasoline is only 10 cents a gallon.

Upon moving into the Armory, Battery E was re-designated as Battery B of the 158th Field Artillery Regiment. In addition to Battery B, the Headquarters for 158th Field Artillery Regiment, along with Company F of the 120th Quartermaster Regiment also moved into the Armory. All three units were part of the 45th Infantry Division.

When Hitler proclaimed the swastika as the symbol of the Nazi Party in Germany, the 45th Infantry Division's shoulder patch was changed to a gold Thunderbird on a square red background. According to Native American lore, the Thunderbird was a gigantic creature with lightning emanating from its piercing eyes and thunder was caused by the flapping its wings. Soldiers assigned to the 45th Infantry Division became known as "Thunderbirds".

Anadarko's National Guard citizen soldiers were mobilized on 16 September 1940 along with the rest of the 45th Infantry Division for what was supposed to be one year of intensive training. However, as the war in Europe became a growing menace to American interests, diplomatic negotiations in the Pacific with the Government of Japan began to break down. As a result, the 45th Infantry Division's one year of active duty was extended in the fall of 1941. After the Japanese attack on December 7th, 1941 and Germany's declaration of war against the United States on December 11th, 1941, the 45th Infantry Division went to war and did not come home again until December of 1945.

Reorganized from an artillery regiment into the 158th Field Artillery Battalion, the Battalion, which included the Anadarko unit, was part of the 157th Regimental Combat Team and had the responsibility for providing close support artillery fire for the Combat Team's infantry soldiers. The soldiers from Anadarko, Oklahoma sailed from Virginia to North Africa and then landed in Sicily in June 1943 as part of General Patton's Seventh Army. From Sicily, the 45th Infantry Division landed on the beaches in Italy at Salerno in September 1943 and then at Anzio in January 1944. At Anzio, pinned down on a surrounded beachhead, the 45th Infantry Division became known as the Rock of Anzio, upon which German assaults were shattered.

The unit based out of the Anadarko WPA armory faced its greatest challenge at Anzio. German panzers broke through the US lines and were racing for the beaches when they ran head on into the 158th Field Artillery and its sister battalion, the 189th Field Artillery. These artillery men from Anadarko, Oklahoma, and their brothers from other Oklahoma communities were the only troops that stood between the Germans and total collapse of the entire Allied beachhead. Using their howitzers in rapid-fire, direct-fire mode against the German panzer tanks, these two artillery battalions of the 45th Division saved the day.

General Mark Clark wrote later that the fields and woods in which the enemy panzer tanks took cover were pulverized. At the height of the battle, the two battalions were firing eight rounds per minute per gun. That's one round every 7.5 seconds. The gun tubes were so hot that the paint was burnt off and the gun barrels glowed bright red.

After the war, Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, who led the German forces against the 45th Division at Anzio, asked his US captors to see the "automatic cannons of the 45th Infantry Division". Kesselring called the 45th Infantry Division the "Falcon Division" because of its shoulder patch and declared it to be one of the two finest allied divisions that he had ever faced.

From Anzio, the 45th Infantry Division landed on the beaches of Southern France in August 1944 and once again joined General Patton to be a part of his Third Army as it raced across Europe and into Germany. On 13 December 1944, the 158th Field Artillery Battalion fired its first artillery round onto German soil. The 45th Infantry Division crossed the Rhine River into Germany, breached the heavily defended Siegfried Line, captured Nuremburg, and liberated the Dachau

Concentration Camp, freeing over 32,000 starving prisoners. From Dachau, the 45th Infantry Division crossed the Danube River and captured Munich just before the end of the war in Europe.

General Patton identified the 45th Division as one of the best divisions, if not the best division in the history of the United States Army. The great news correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote about them as "Brave Men" in his articles and books. The 45th Infantry Division came home in December 1945, almost five full years after they were first mobilized in September 1940.

In the years immediately after World War II, the 45th Infantry Division was reorganized into an all Oklahoma National Guard Division and many units within Oklahoma were reassigned to new locations. The Anadarko Armory remained the home for the Battery B First Battalion 158th Field Artillery.

On September 1, 1950, the entire 45th Infantry Division, including the Anadarko unit, was again called to active duty. Following training at Fort Polk and then in Japan, the Division deployed into Korea. The Battalion fired its first combat artillery round since World War II on 22 December 1951. The Thunderbirds served in the Yonchon-Chowon area immediately north of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. In fierce battles against Chinese and North Korean troops, the 45th Infantry Division made the battlegrounds known as Old Baldy, Pork Chop Hill, Heartbreak Ridge, and Luke's Castle famous. The 158th Field Artillery Battalion fired its last artillery round nineteen minutes before the negotiated Armistice went into effect on 27 July 1953 to bring a cease fire to the Korean War.

After the end of the war in Korea, Battery B was re-designated Battery A and in 1959 was re-equipped first with 155mm towed howitzers and in 1963, returned to using the 105mm howitzers. In 1968, the First Battalion 158th Field Artillery, became part of the new 45th Field Artillery Brigade when the 45th Infantry Division was reorganized into three separate brigades. In that year, the Anadarko battery was re-equipped with eight-inch towed howitzers. Eight inches refers to the diameter of the artillery shell that is fired from an eight inch howitzer. An eight inch diameter artillery shell weighs 200 pounds and can be fired at targets up to eleven miles away. In 1971, after attaining a high level of trained proficiency, the entire battalion, including the Anadarko battery received the M110 self-propelled eight-inch howitzers.

In 1987, the First Battalion 158th Field Artillery became the first National Guard unit in the nation to be equipped with the new armored self-propelled M-270 MLRS or Multiple-Launch Rocket System. A single MLRS launch vehicle, with a crew of three, could carry twelve rockets, all of which could be fired in less than a minute, at targets up to thirty miles away. A single M-270 MLRS vehicle carried more firepower than an entire battalion of World War II artillery cannons. The First Battalion 158th Field Artillery, including Battery A from Anadarko, was rushed to Southeast Asia in late 1990 where it played a significant role as part of the 1991 famous "Hail Mary" left hook that punched through Iraqi resistance and in one hundred hours, raced to within firing range of Bagdad in Operation Desert Storm. They were the first Army National Guard soldiers in the nation to fire artillery rounds in combat since the Korean War.

The National Guard soldiers of Anadarko were also among the first to answer the call for help from the Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. They have since deployed to Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan.

This Armory has supported the Oklahoma Army National Guard for over seventy-seven years. The heritage of the soldiers who walked in this Armory is written in the history books of the United States, North Africa, Europe, Korea, Southwest Asia, and the Middle East. It was highly appropriate that this Armory, with its long history and heritage for service to the community, be returned to the community, so that it may continue that tradition and history of service.