

Transfer of Cushing Armory Oklahoma Army National Guard April 24th, 2009

Heritage of the Cushing Armory – COL (Ret) David Brown

Oklahoma, throughout its history, has a tradition of volunteer militia units, composed of the town citizens, who were dedicated to the defense of their community, state, and nation. During the 1920s and 1930s, most Oklahoma Army National Guard units met in public schools and lodge halls. They rented the upper floors of downtown buildings for the storage of their equipment and trained in the open fields outside of the community.

These 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 muster the necessary resources to build any 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. This armory was one of many proposed Oklahoma armories approved for construction by the WPA.

On September 5th, 1935, two sisters, Annie and Bessie Swartout sold approximately one half of the land upon which the armory now stands to the State of Oklahoma for the purpose of constructing a National Guard armory. The sale price for the land was \$10. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel R. Rice of Madison County, Illinois deeded the rest of the land needed for the armory to the State of Oklahoma for \$1 on September 30th, 1935.

Oklahoma's WPA armories are immediately recognizable by their style. Architect and National Guard Major Bryan Nolen used standard plans for one, two, and four-unit armories. These Art Deco armories were designed to look like military castle battlements by the use of parapets and arched entryways. Inside each armory was a huge central drill hall, a subterranean rifle range, garages, and administrative offices. Following the WPA's practical make-work philosophy, construction was accomplished by unskilled workers, and consequently, craftsmanship depended on the supervisors' and laborers' skill and experience level. The Cushing Armory was built in 1936 as a one-unit armory and was officially opened for business soon afterwards.

In 1936, the nation's unemployment rate fell from 19% to just under 17%. The average hourly wage was 75 cents for a 44 hour working week. The average rent for a house was \$24 a month. A loaf of bread cost 8 cents. A new Studebaker car cost \$665. Gas was only 10 cents a gallon. Great Britain's King Edward VIII abdicated his throne to marry Wallis Simpson. President Roosevelt was re-elected for a second term. Jesse Owens won four Gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Berlin. The Spanish Civil War began and Germany broke the Treaty of Versailles which began the events that led to the Second World War.

This armory is more than just concrete, mortar, blocks, and wood. To the soldiers who were assigned here, this building was their home base. From here, National Guard soldiers went forth in times of flood, tornados, and other natural disasters to answer the cry for help from the citizens of Oklahoma. Individuals and families in need of food and water have been fed and taken to shelter. Lost children have been found and returned to their loved ones. Homes and businesses have been guarded and protected following natural disasters until their owners could safely return.

The Cushing Armory originally belonged to the 120th Medical Regiment which was part of the famous 45th Infantry Division. During World War II, the soldiers from Cushing served in North Africa and then landed in Sicily as part of General Patton's Seventh Army.

From Sicily, they landed on the beaches at Salerno and Anzio, Italy. The famous war correspondent Ernie Pyle praised the medical treatment and care provided by the 120th Medical Regiment in the newspaper columns he wrote for publication back home. General George Patton identified the 45th Division as one of the best divisions, if not the best division in the history of the United States Army. In August of 1944, they landed on the beaches of Southern France and once again joined General Patton as part of his Third Army in its race across Europe and into Germany, contributing to the final defeat of Nazi Germany.

After the end of World War II, the Division returned home to Oklahoma and the Cushing Armory became home to the First Battalion 279th Infantry Regiment. As part of the 45th Infantry Division, the men of the Cushing Armory were called upon again to fight in Korea during the Korean Conflict.

In 1968, the 45th Division was reorganized into the 45th Infantry Brigade, the 45th Field Artillery Brigade, and the 90th Troop Command. As part of the 45th Infantry Brigade, the soldiers of the Cushing Armory became part of the First Battalion 179th Infantry Regiment. The citizen soldiers from Cushing have continued to serve their nation in REFORGER Exercises in Germany, Bosnia, Egypt, the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

The heritage of community service that surrounds the Cushing Armory is the result of the exemplary actions of these citizen soldiers who answered their community's, their state's and their nation's call with hard work, sacrifice, dedication, and compassion for those in need. It is more than appropriate, if not fitting, that this Armory, with its heritage for service to the community, be returned to the community, so that it may continued that tradition and history of service.