

**Transfer of Elk City Armory
Oklahoma Army National Guard
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History of the Elk City Armory – Colonel (Retired) David W. Brown

On December 15th, 1948, Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Frances Wade sold the land upon which this armory stands to the State of Oklahoma for the token sum of \$1.00. The land was to be used for the benefit of the Oklahoma National Guard. It was accepted by Governor Roy C. Turner and construction of the armory began in 1949. The armory was completed in 1950 and Company C First Battalion, 179th Infantry Regiment was transferred from Oklahoma City to the Elk City Armory.

In 1950, Harry Truman was President and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began in earnest. The "US Guide to Atomic Attack" was published by the US Government in 1950 and became a best seller. The price of gasoline ranged from 18 to 27 cents a gallon. The first plastic credit card was introduced and the Korean War began.

The engineers tell me that this building has over 9,800 square feet of space and they can provide all sorts of information about its construction. But this building is more than the simple sum of concrete, mortar, blocks, and wood. It has a heritage that I would like to review with everyone here today.

Company C, the unit that was originally assigned here, came with an interesting heritage. It was originally mustered into service on May 13th, 1926. At that time, all of the enlisted soldiers were high school students from the Capitol High School in Oklahoma City. Its officers consisted of members of the high school faculty. The Company was first called to duty in 1927 when Charles Lindbergh, the first pilot to fly non-stop across the Atlantic, visited Oklahoma City. The unit had the honor and the responsibility to guard Lindbergh's aircraft, the "Spirit of St. Louis", which is now on display in the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.

On November 19th, 1930, the Company deployed into Bethany, Oklahoma after a devastating tornado all but destroyed the town. The unit received meritorious acclaim from the citizens for their service in rescuing survivors and protecting property. On a more interesting note, in a dubious action that I need to do more research on, the unit was officially credited in 1933 with helping to bring 3.2 beer into the State of Oklahoma. I don't know if this means they single-handedly created the consumer demand for the beer or that the soldiers of Company C escorted and protected the beer truck.

In the United States Army, each soldier assigned to an Army division or brigade wears a unique shoulder patch that identifies the division or brigade to which the soldier is assigned. Since the creation of the 45th Infantry Division in 1923, 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. 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 emanated from its piercing eyes and thunder caused by the flapping its wings. Soldiers assigned to the 45th Infantry Division became known as "Thunderbirds".

During World War II, as part of the famous 45th Infantry Division, Company C and soldiers from Elk City, Oklahoma served in North Africa and then landed in Sicily under the command of General Patton. From Sicily, they landed on the beaches at Salerno and Anzio, Italy. At Anzio, the 45th Infantry Division became known as the Rock of Anzio when despite overwhelming odds, the Thunderbirds refused to yield and stopped the massive German counter-attack. On August 15th, 1944, the Division 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. They broke through the Germany's Siegfried Line, captured Nuremburg, liberated the 32,000 survivors of the Dachau Concentration Camp, and captured Munich. After the end of World War II, the Division returned home to Oklahoma.

Following the war, the Oklahoma National Guard determined that they needed to put a new armory in Elk City. The Elk City Armory opened in 1950 but Company C only got to spend just a few months in their new armory. On September 1, 1950, Company C and the entire 45th Infantry Division was recalled to active duty for service in the Korean War. After training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the Division boarded their transport ships in New Orleans and sailed for Japan through the Panama Canal. After additional training in Japan, the Division deployed into Korea where in fierce battles against Chinese and North Korean troops, the Thunderbirds made the battlegrounds known as Old Baldy, Pork Chop Hill, Heartbreak Ridge, and Luke's Castle famous. The majority of Oklahoma's Guardsmen began returning to the States in the spring of 1952, but the Division, manned by replacement personnel, remained in Korea until the end of the conflict in 1953.

In 1968, the 45th Infantry Division was reorganized into what is known today as the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 45th Field Artillery Brigade, and 90th Troop Command. The Elk City Armory was assigned to the First Battalion 171st Field Artillery under the command of Headquarters, 45th Field Artillery Brigade. The last unit assigned to the Elk City Armory was Battery B, First Battalion 171st Field Artillery.

This Armory has supported the Oklahoma Army National Guard for almost fifty years. Since 1990, National Guard soldiers from Elk City have deployed to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and in 2008, Iraq. The heritage of the soldiers who walked in this Armory is written in the history books of the United States and throughout the world. It is 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 continued to serve the community.