

Transfer of the Hobart Army National Guard Armory

217 N. Lincoln Street, Hobart, Oklahoma 73651

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Heritage of the Hobart Armory – COL (Ret) David Brown, Executive Director, 45th Infantry Division Museum, 2145 NE 36th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73111

The first Oklahoma Army National Guard unit in Hobart was organized after the end of World War II as part of the National Guard's 45th Infantry Division. I would like to tell you a little bit about the 45th Infantry Division before I tell you about Hobart's place in history.

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 the 1920's, the shoulder patch of the 45th Infantry Division was a yellow swastika worn on a diamond 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 of its wings. Soldiers assigned to the 45th Infantry Division became known as "Thunderbirds".

During World War II, the 45th Infantry Division served briefly in North Africa and then landed in Sicily as part of General Patton's Seventh Army. From Sicily, the 45th Infantry Division landed on the beaches in Italy at Salerno and then again at Anzio. At Anzio, pinned down on a surrounded beachhead, the 45th Infantry Division became famous as the Rock of Anzio, upon which German assaults were shattered.

In August of 1944, the 45th 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. The 45th Infantry Division crossed the Rhine River into Germany, breached the heavily defended Siegfried Line, captured Nuremberg, 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. Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, commander of German Forces in Italy, 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.

After the end of World War II and the return of the 45th Infantry Division, the division was reorganized from a four state National Guard division into an all Oklahoma division. New armories were needed to house the wide variety of new Oklahoma Army National Guard units. Hobart became the site of one of those new units. The new unit was Company C, 245th Heavy Tank Battalion. In the summer of 1949, the City of Hobart converted a sales barn at 300 North Washington Street, just west of here, into a temporary armory for a hundred of Hobart's citizen soldiers.

At the same time, the City of Hobart deeded the land upon which we are now standing to the State of Oklahoma for the purpose of building a new 9880 square foot National Guard armory. The unit was officially recognized by the United States Army on 4 April 1949. At the same time, construction of a new permanent armory began at this location. In the early summer of 1950, this armory was completed and the men of Company C moved into their new home.

It was a different world back in 1950. The Second World War had ended only five years earlier. Almost every man in America from his mid-twenties and older was a veteran. Walt Disney's cartoon classic, "Cinderella" was showing in movie theaters. The very first credit card purchase was made in New York using a Diners Club card. The first Volkswagen bus rolled off of the assembly lines that year. The television game show "Truth or Consequences" debuted. The comic strip "Peanuts" by Charles Schulz was published in newspapers for the very first time. The development of today's man-cave became possible when the first TV remote was built and marketed by Zenith.

And on 25 June 1950, North Korean troops, backed by Chinese and Soviet military forces poured across the border into South Korea in overwhelming numbers. Two days later, President Harry S. Truman ordered United States Armed Forces into combat to aid in the defense of South Korea. Within weeks of moving into their new armory, Hobart's Company C, along with the rest of the 45th Infantry Division, was alerted for mobilization and deployment. On 1 September 1950, the entire 45th Infantry Division was once again ordered to Federal active duty.

Following extensive training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and then in Japan, the 45th Infantry Division landed at Inchon, Korea and entered combat on 10 December 1951. By the beginning of 1952, the entire Division was heavily engaged in combat operations. Throughout its deployment, the Division blocked the primary avenue of approach from North Korea to Seoul, the capital city of South Korea. In fierce battles against Chinese and North Korean troops, Oklahoma's 45th Infantry Division made the battlegrounds known as Old Baldy, Pork Chop Hill, Heartbreak Ridge, and Luke's Castle famous. In four campaigns throughout the Korean War, the Division completed 429 days of combat operations and officially returned home to Oklahoma on 25 September 1954.

On 1 February 1968, the 45th Infantry Division was reorganized into three separate brigades. After 47 years, the 45th Infantry Division no longer existed. The new separate brigades, who trace their lineage and history to the 45th Infantry Division, are today identified as the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 45th Fires Brigade, and 90th Troop Command. The Hobart unit became the Communications and Counter-battery Radar Platoons for Battery A 171st Field Artillery Battalion. A few years later, the battalion was later equipped with eight inch self-propelled howitzers that could fire a 200 pound projectile twenty miles down range. In 1990, it became the second artillery battalion in the Oklahoma Army National Guard to convert to the M-270 self-propelled, armored vehicle which carried the Multiple Launch Rocket System or MLRS for short. The M-270 Launch vehicle could fire up to twelve 675 pound rockets twenty-six miles downrange. A single MLRS Launch Vehicle with a three man crew could obliterate everything in a target area of a thousand meter by a thousand meter square in a single salvo.

Since 9/11, the citizen soldiers from Hobart, Oklahoma have mobilized and deployed for Homeland Defense missions within the United States as well as overseas to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq. Many were part of the Oklahoma National Guard disaster relief force that rapidly deployed to New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Think about this. The legacy of the soldiers who walked in this Armory is now written in the history books of the United States, Korea, and Southwest Asia. For over sixty years, the citizen-soldiers of Hobart have truly made a difference at home and throughout the entire world. It is highly appropriate that this Armory, with its history and heritage for service to the community, be returned to the community, so that it may continued that tradition and history of service.

