

## **Transfer of Hominy Armory Oklahoma Army National Guard April 10, 2009**

### **Heritage of the Hominy Armory** – Colonel David W. Brown (Retired)

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 October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1935, Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Pearson of Hominy sold 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 \$1.

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 Hominy Armory was built as a one-unit armory and was officially opened for business in 1938.

In 1938, the nation's unemployment rate was 19%. The minimum hourly wage was 40 cents for a 44 hour working week. Orson Wells' dramatization of the "War of the World" radio program as a breaking news story caused panic throughout the nation. Howard Hughes set a new aviation record by flying around the world in only 3 days and 19 hours. Oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia and the cost of gasoline was only 10 cents a gallon.

This armory is more than just concrete, mortar, blocks, and wood. To the citizens of Hominy and of this Great State, this Armory represents much more. 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. Countless lives have been saved throughout Oklahoma because of the actions of the soldiers based in this Armory.

Individuals and families in desperate straits have been rescued. Those 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 Hominy Armory belonged to the 160th Field Artillery Regiment which traces its historical lineage to the First Oklahoma Field Artillery Regiment, which was organized on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921 with a Regimental Headquarters and the First and Second Field Artillery Battalions. The regiment's primary weapons consisted of horse-drawn 75 mm cannons.

Soon afterwards, the First Battalion was re-organized into the 160<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment and was re-armed with truck-towed 105 mm howitzers. The Regiment also became part of the famous 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. During World War II, the soldiers from Hominy 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. General Patton identified the 45<sup>th</sup> 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 only to be called upon again to fight in Korea during the Korean Conflict. In 1968, the 45<sup>th</sup> Division was reorganized into the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, the 45<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Brigade, and the 90<sup>th</sup> Troop Command.

As part of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, the soldiers of the Hominy Armory became part of the First Battalion 179<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. The citizen soldiers from Hominy have continued to serve their nation in REFORGER Exercises in Germany, Bosnia, Egypt, the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, Operation Endearing Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

The heritage of community service that surrounds the Hominy 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.