

Transfer of the Marlow Army National Guard Armory

702 West Main Street, Marlow, Oklahoma

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

The citizens of Marlow, Oklahoma have a long heritage of service to the State and Nation through military service. This heritage began on June 22, 1927 when the 45th Military Police Company was officially transferred from Maud, Oklahoma to Marlow. Marlow's National Guard company, 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 6 September 1935, the City of Marlow sold the land upon which we stand to the Oklahoma National Guard for the purpose of constructing an armory. The land was sold for the token sum of \$1. Now a dollar was worth something back then. I ran it through my computer's inflation calculator and found out that a 1935 dollar is equal to \$16.74 in today's funds.

The Marlow Armory was one of 51 armories in Oklahoma that were built by the WPA. All of them were designed to look like military castle battlements with the use of parapets, arched entryways, and false towers at the corners. Inside each armory was a central drill hall, a subterranean rifle range under the stage, garages, and administrative offices. Construction on the 14,900 square-foot Marlow Armory began in 1937 and completed on 26 February 1938.

In 1938, it was a different world from what we know today. 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.

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, 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".

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, 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.

Marlow's Military Police Company, along with the rest of the 45th Infantry Division was called to Federal active duty on 15 September 1940 for what was supposed to be one year of active duty training. 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.

During World War II, the soldiers from Marlow, Oklahoma served 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 known as the Rock of Anzio, upon which German assaults were shattered. 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.

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. 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 into an all Oklahoma division. The 45th Military Police Company was moved to Atoka, Oklahoma and the Marlow Armory became the new home of Company G 179th Infantry. Company G went to the Korean War as part of the 45th Infantry Division when the division was again ordered to Federal active duty on September 1, 1950.

Following training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and in Japan, the 45th Infantry Division landed at Inchon, Korea and proceeded by rail to an assembly area near Yonchon, preparatory to relieving the 1st Cavalry Division in front line positions near Chorwon. Advance units of the 45th Infantry Division entered combat on 10 December 1951 and by the beginning of 1952, the entire Division was heavily engaged in combat operations. 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. Marlow's Company G received the US Army's Distinguished Unit Citation for their actions in the Korean War. In four campaigns throughout the Korean War, the Division completed 429 days of combat operations and in a special ceremony conducted at the Oklahoma State Fairground on 25 September 1954, the Division officially returned to Oklahoma.

In 1968, the 45th Infantry Division ceased to exist when it was reorganized into three separate brigades. These brigades are today identified as the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, the 45th Fires Brigade, and 90th Troop Command. Company G was reorganized and became part of the First Battalion 158th Field Artillery. Equipped with the new Multiple Launch Rocket System, the Battalion was a critical player in the events of Operation Desert Storm. The last unit assigned to the Idabel Armory was Detachment 1, Battery C First Battalion 158th Field Artillery. Since 1990, National Guard soldiers from Marlow have deployed to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and again back to Iraq.

Think about this. This Armory has supported the Oklahoma Army National Guard for over seventy years. The heritage of the soldiers who walked in this Armory is written in the history books of the United States, Europe, North Africa, Korea, and Southwest Asia. 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 continue to serve the community.

