

Transfer of the Miami Army National Guard Armory

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

In the United States Army, every 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. When the 45th Infantry Division was created in 1921, 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 of its wings. Ever since, soldiers assigned to the 45th Infantry Division became known as "Thunderbirds".

After the end of World War II and the return of the 45th Infantry Division, the division was reorganized into an all Oklahoma division and Miami became the home of Battery D of the 145th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, Self-Propelled. Translated, that means the battalion was equipped with half-track armored vehicles which carried four 50 caliber machines mounted in a motorized quad mount on the back of the half-track. The Battalion Headquarters was located in Pawhuska with subordinate units assigned to armories in Nowata, Fairfax, Vinita, and Miami.

The newly assigned Battery D needed a home and the City of Miami stepped forward to establish that home for its new Oklahoma Army National Guard unit. On 18 April 1949, the City of Miami 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. Construction soon began on the 9,880 square-foot Miami Armory with a central drill hall, class rooms, arms vault, and administrative offices.

In 1949, it was a different world from what we know today. The Second World War had ended just four years earlier. The minimum hourly wage was 70 cents. The average annual salary was \$2,950. The first television Western, "Hopalong Cassidy" aired on NBC. The last six surviving veterans of the American Civil War meet for a reunion in Indianapolis. Forty-five rpm records were introduced for the first time and gasoline cost only 17 cents a gallon.

1949 was also a dangerous time. The Soviet Union had just exploded its first nuclear bomb, ending the four year monopoly by the United States. The North Atlantic Treaty is signed in Washington DC creating the NATO defense alliance. The Soviet blockade of Berlin ended that year, in large measure because of the heroic efforts of the United States Air Force and the success of the Berlin Airlift. Mao Tse Tung's communist forces defeated the army of China's Nationalist Government and proclaimed mainland China as the new Communist Peoples Republic of China. The National Government of China fled to the island of Taiwan, separated from the mainland by only the Formosa Straits. It was an understatement to say that international tensions were running high. Then on 25 June, 1950, the army of North Korea, backed by Communist China, poured across the border into South Korea triggering the entry of the United States into the Korean War.

The 145th Triple A Battalion, and the men from Miami, went to the Korean War as part of the 45th Infantry Division when the division was ordered to Federal active duty on September 1, 1950. The Thunderbirds served in the Yonchon-Chowon area and in fierce battles against Chinese and North Korean troops, 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 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.

The last unit assigned to the Miami Armory was Company B First Battalion 279th Infantry. The 279th Infantry Battalion is another Oklahoma Army National Guard organization with a rich and a proud heritage that began in the Korean War as part of the 45th Infantry Division. In September of 2000, elements of the Battalion deployed to Bosnia as part of NATO's Stabilization Force. In April of 2004, over 350 soldiers from the Battalion deployed with the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team as part of Coalition Joint Task Force Phoenix in Afghanistan. In September of 2005, the entire Brigade executed a rapid deployment to New Orleans following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina to provide disaster relief to the citizens of Louisiana and Mississippi. In October of 2007, major components of the 45th Infantry Brigade, including the First Battalion 279th Infantry, mobilized, deployed to Iraq, and returned a year later. The Battalion is currently engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan.

Think about this. The legacy of the soldiers who walked in the Miami Armory is now written in the history books of the United States, Europe, Korea, and Southwest Asia. For over sixty years, the citizen-soldiers of Miami made a difference at home and throughout the entire world. It was 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.