

Transfer of the Capitol Hill Army National Guard Armory

2222 SW 44th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73119

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

One of the first actions taken by the Oklahoma Territorial Council when it convened in August 1890 was the creation of the Territorial Militia. Although the formation of two infantry regiments, two cavalry battalions, and one artillery battery was allowed, little funding was provided, and in 1895, the militia was reorganized as the Oklahoma National Guard, twelve years before statehood. The Oklahoma National Guard was not federalized during the Spanish-American War, but with the permission of the Oklahoma National Guard leadership, numerous officers and enlisted men left to serve with the First United States Volunteer Cavalry under the command of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. The unit was more commonly known as Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders who became famous on 1 July 1898 when they stormed first Kettle Hill and then the San Juan Heights and captured the strategic heights from the Spanish troops in hand-to-hand combat.

In 1899, the Oklahoma National Guard was reorganized as the First Oklahoma Infantry Regiment. With statehood in 1907, the units were shifted from western Oklahoma, formerly known as the Oklahoma Territory, to eastern Oklahoma, formerly known as the Indian Territory. In June 1916, the Oklahoma National Guard was called into federal service to protect the United States border from raids out of Mexico by Poncho Villa and other Mexican revolutionaries. The Oklahoma Guardsmen returned to Oklahoma and were mustered out on 12 March 1917 only to be mobilized two weeks later for service in World War I. At Camp Bowie, Texas, the First Oklahoma Infantry Regiment was combined with the Seventh Texas Infantry Regiment to form the 142nd Regiment of the Thirty-sixth Infantry Division. Ninety-five years ago today, Oklahoma Guardsmen arrived in France and served on the frontlines in northeast France on Blanc Mont Ridge and in the Ferme Forest. After the Armistice on 11 November 1918, the Oklahoma Guardsmen returned to Oklahoma in July 1919.

Under the provisions of the National Defense Act of 1920, the 45th Infantry Division was created in 1921 from the combined National Guard units of Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. 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.

All of Oklahoma's National Guard units were 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 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.

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 Infantry Division was one of two National Guard divisions mobilized for the Korean War on September 1, 1950. The Division entered combat on 10 December 1951 and 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 on 25 September 1954.

On 28 November 1962, the City of Oklahoma City deeded land for a new armory on Southwest 44th Street. The new Armory of unofficially designated the Capitol Hill Armory but soldiers throughout the Oklahoma Army National Guard began to call it the 44th Street Armory in order to distinguish it from the 23rd Street Armory that stood just west of the State Capitol Building. Construction of the new 22,000 square foot armory was completed in 1964.

It was a different world back in 1964. Lyndon Baines Johnson was President of the United States. North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the US Navy destroyers Maddox and C. Turner Joy off the coast of Viet Nam, triggering Congress to enact the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which authorized the immediate and rapid buildup of US Forces in Viet Nam. The very first Ford Mustang rolls off of the assembly line that year. A relatively new British musical group called the Beatles appeared for the first time on the Ed Sullivan Show. Elizabeth Taylor married Richard Burton, for the first time in 1964. "Mary Poppins" was showing in the movie theaters. Bubble Wrap was invented that year. A postage stamp cost only five cents. Gas was only thirty cents a gallon.

There have been a multitude of Oklahoma Army National Guard units assigned to this armory. The first unit was the 745th Military Police Company from the 45th Military Police Battalion headquartered in McAlester, Oklahoma. In 1968, the 45th Infantry Division was reorganized into three separate brigades and after 47 years, ceased to exist. These 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.

In 1977, the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the Second Battalion 180th Infantry and Company A from that same battalion were also assigned to the 44th Street Armory. The Second Battalion was one of four very unique battalions within the United States Army. Armed with jeeps that mounted the Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided Anti-Tank Missile System, or TOW System, the mission of the Second Battalion 180th Infantry was to kill enemy tanks. Its soldiers became known as "Tow Dogs" who designed and wore a totally unauthorized shoulder patch that the United States Army, in its infinite but misguided wisdom, failed to accept.

Years later, when technology on the battlefield changed, the concept of jeep mounted TOW systems became obsolete and the two units of the Second Battalion 180th Infantry ceased their organizational colors and ceased to exist.

In 1990, the 745th Military Police Company mobilized and became one of many Oklahoma Army National Guard units to be deployed overseas as part of Operation Desert Storm. After Desert Storm, new units were assigned to the 44th Street Armory, replacing both the Military Police Company and the TOW units. The new units were Company A and Company C of the First Battalion 179th Infantry. Both units can trace their heritage and lineage directly to the 45th Infantry Division and even earlier to the First Oklahoma Infantry Regiment in 1899, eight years before Oklahoma became a state.

Since Desert Storm, the National Guard soldiers from this Armory have deployed to Germany, Bosnia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan. They were also among the first to answer the call for help from the Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina when the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, reinforced with many additional units from Oklahoma, executed a rapid deployment into New Orleans.

Think about this. For forty-eight years, the legacy of the citizen-soldiers who walked in this armory is now written in the history books. They 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.