

Transfer of the Seminole Army National Guard Armory

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Heritage of the Seminole 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".

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.

The 45th Infantry Division deployed to North Africa and then began combat operations when they 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 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.

In August of 1944, the 45th Division made an amphibious landing on the beaches of Southern France. Once ashore, the 45th Infantry Division 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 Nuremburg, 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.

After the end of World War II and the return of the 45th Infantry Division, the division was reorganized into an all Oklahoma division. One of the new battalions brought into the state from New Mexico was the 120th Engineer Battalion. Seminole, which until then, did not have a National Guard unit to call its own, was selected to become the home of Company B of the 120th Engineer Battalion.

On 1 September 1950, the entire 45th Infantry Division, including the men from Seminole, was called for service in the Korean War. 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.

Fighting became so heavy during the month of June, that the Division's artillery fired 163,000 artillery rounds in support of its infantry units. During the peak of the fighting, the Division's artillery batteries fired 43,000 artillery rounds in 48 hours at a rate of 15 rounds per minute for every minute of the entire 48 hour period. 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.

While the Division was still serving in Korea, the citizens of Seminole were working to secure a permanent armory for the Seminole unit. Before they were called for service in Korea, the Seminole unit had been operating out of rented temporary facilities. On 19 November 1953, Seminole's American Legion Post #204, deeded the land upon which we stand to the Oklahoma National Guard for the purpose of constructing an Armory. The Armory, with over 11,000 square feet of drill floor, administrative offices, classrooms, vehicle maintenance bays, and supply rooms, was built in 1954.

1954 was an interesting year. Dwight D. Eisenhower was President of the United States and Richard Nixon was Vice President. Marilyn Monroe married Joe DiMaggio. Sports Illustrated published its first issue. Oprah Winfrey, Christie Brinkley, Ron Howard, and Condoleezza Rice were all born in 1954. The first "Godzilla" movie premiered in Tokyo, Japan. And 11 April 1954 was officially designated as the Most Boring Day in the 20th Century.

The last unit assigned to the Seminole Armory was Battery B First Battalion 160th Field Artillery. This battalion was part of the 160th Field Artillery Regiment which traces its historical lineage to the First Oklahoma Field Artillery Regiment, which was organized in Oklahoma on July 18th, 1921.

In 1968, the 45th Infantry Division ceased to exist when it was reorganized into three separate brigades. One of those brigades is the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team which includes as one of its major components, the First Battalion 160th Field Artillery.

In late 2001, soldiers of the Battalion deployed to Pine Bluff, Arkansas as part of the nation's Homeland Defense force that was needed in the days following the terrorist attacks in New York City and the Pentagon on 11 September of that year. In April of 2004, many of the Guardsmen from Seminole 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 160th Field Artillery, mobilized, deployed to Iraq, and returned a year later. The Battalion is currently deployed and is engaged in security operations in Kuwait.

Think about this. The legacy of the soldiers who walked in the Seminole Armory is now written in the history books of the United States, Japan, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. For over seventy years, the citizen-soldiers of Seminole 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.