

**Transfer of Tonkawa Armory
Oklahoma Army National Guard
March 27, 2009**

Heritage of the Tonkawa Armory – Colonel David W. Brown (Retired)

On May 19th, 1978, the City of Tonkawa sold the land upon which we stand to the State of Oklahoma for the purpose of constructing a National Guard armory. The sale price for the land was a token \$1. This building has over 16,600 square feet of space and was built to house the Service Battery of the First Battalion 189th Field Artillery Regiment.

In 1978, Ronald Reagan was President and he was running for re-election to a second term against Walter Mondale. A gallon of gas cost only \$1.10. Movie tickets averaged \$2.50. “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom”, “Ghostbusters”, and “Terms of Endearment” were playing in the movie theaters. The first Apple Macintosh home computer went on sale and Sony introduced the first 3 ½” computer disk. The Summer Olympics were held in Los Angeles but the Soviet Union boycotted the games in retaliation for the Western boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980. And Prince Harry, heir to the British throne, was born.

To the citizens of Tonkawa and of this Great State, this Armory has a heritage that I would like to review with everyone here today. 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 heritage of the unit assigned here goes beyond 1984 when this armory was constructed. Tonkawa was one of the home towns of the 189th Field Artillery Regiment which traces its historical lineage to the Oklahoma Volunteer Militia which formed in 1890, seventeen years before statehood. This organization served in the Spanish-American War, chased Poncho Villa into Mexico, and also served in the First World War.

In 1921, it became part of the famous 45th Infantry Division. During World War II, the soldiers from Tonkawa, Oklahoma 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 45th Division as one of the best divisions, if not the best division in the history of the United States Army.

I recently found some letters written by a young officer assigned to the 189th Field Artillery Regiment. Written by Lieutenant Harold Kleindienst on 29 December 1943 to his parents from somewhere in Italy, it describes his Christmas.

I know it’s kinda late for the greeting but “Merry Christmas”. Sent you all a card which, at the time of this writing, should be in your hands – extending all greetings of the season. Hope it arrived in time and in fairly good shape. Christmas has come and, once again, gone. It was a far cry from the holiday thoughts of deep down in our hearts but nevertheless, it was much nicer than perhaps we expected it to be. This is being written by candlelight and I know legibility won’t be the outstanding feature so please bear with me. The battery commander and I went out and cut down a small pine tree – trimmed it with greeting cards and package wrappings – mounted it on a box covered with more package wrappings and one of my white face towels. Surrounded the

base with candy, cigarettes, gum, and two cans of Maxwell House coffee. The first sergeant did the trimming with a little help.

In August of 1944, Lieutenant Kleindienst and the 189th Field Artillery Regiment, as part of the 45th Infantry 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 and into Germany.

On 13 September, 1944, newly promoted Captain Kleindienst wrote to his parents from somewhere in France.

Just a few lines to let you know that we're still percolating in these parts – moving ahead continuously. The Krauts find it difficult standing up against the never ceasing pressure being applied in all sectors and as a result, the distance between us and Berlin is swiftly being whittled away. I've mentioned the very wonderful manner in which these people greet us as we enter the freshly liberated towns – the hugging and kissing, the offering of liquor and food, the flower strewn streets, the bunting draped homes and buildings, the cheers amid tears, the music, the singing. In one town, a brass band played as we rolled on through. On a road between towns, a little boy stood at attention, hand raised in salute, singing the last war favorite "Over There" just as loud as he possibly could. Best of all, of course is the "fighting" our way through all of that wonderful lipstick. Of course, the old long-bearded menfolk pull the same stunt and that's not so nice. Received the razor blades and cigarette lighter and many, many thanks. Sure do appreciate all the wonderful gestures. Well, it's nearing two in the morning and I'm about to trudge 200 yards through a heavy rainstorm from our command post here to my cot and sack. Good night and I'll write again soon.

On 7 November 1944, from somewhere in France, Captain Kleindienst wrote:

The closer we get to Germany, the more complete is the destruction – towns and villages uprooted and riddled from end to end; acres of woodland whittled and splintered by screaming shells and their jagged fragments; fields spotted with gaping shell holes and the rotting carcasses of cattle; homes that are now punctured shells of brick and masonry – this is war torn country, much like the scenes in ravaged Italy. Don't know how much longer this mess will continue and I wouldn't attempt to venture a guess but I don't see how the Krauts can hold out for any length of time, being pounded from all sides, from the air and on the ground – just all of the time. There's not much in the way of news – we're still giving the Krauts as much hell as we can ram into the tubes of our fast spitting guns and we continue the relentless drive which started for this Division way back in Sicily. Merry Christmas in case I don't get another letter off in time for the holidays.

Major Kleindienst survived the war. After the end of World War II, the 45th Infantry Division returned home to Oklahoma only to be called upon again to fight in Korea during the Korean Conflict.

In 1968, the First Battalion 189th Field Artillery, became part of the new 45th Field Artillery Brigade when the 45th Division was reorganized into three separate brigades. The soldiers of the 45th Field Artillery Brigade became the first National Guard soldiers in the nation to fire artillery rounds in combat during the opening minutes of Operation Desert Storm. They were among the first to answer to call for help from the Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Even now, they are currently deployed to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The heritage of military and community service that surrounds this facility 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.

