

Owensboro, Kentucky

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A Brief History of the Kentucky National Guard In Owensboro



A National Guard unit was first established in Owensboro in 1946, when it was Company I, 149th Regimental Combat Team (Infantry). This unit was located in Owensboro until 1955. In 1949, another unit, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC) of the 201st Engineer Battalion was established at the armory. This unit stayed until 1959, when it was transferred to Ashland. From 1949 to 1956, a Medical Detachment of the 201st Engineers was stationed in Owensboro. From 1951 to 59, Company C of the 201st Engineers was there, and from 1955 to 1959, Company A of the 240th Tank Battalion (120mm sp) was stationed there. Until 1964, tank battalions were stationed in Owensboro. In 1964, HHC of the 2/123rd Armor was established. From 1972 to 1985, a Combat Support Company was established, and from 1980 to 1985, Troop A of the 240th Armed Cavalry was in Owensboro. From 1985 to the present, Company D and Detachment 1 of the 2/123rd Armor has been stationed in Owensboro. Senator Wendell Ford was the Commander of the 240th Tank Battalion between 1955-59.

The only time units from Owensboro have seen active duty (besides state active duty), was in 1961, during the Berlin crisis. For nine months the men were at camp preparing for overseas duty, but they were never called up, and the crisis was resolved.

The armory was completed in 1948, but not formally dedicated until January 30, 1949.

"...on January 30, 1949, a new \$408,000 armory was dedicated on land which had been part of Moreland Park. A small crowd gathered around the armory steps, huddled against a cold wind, as Brigadier General Roscoe Murray of the Kentucky National Guard spoke of the need for a 'well-trained citizen army' as the only alternative to a large standing army, a fear so great for Americans that it is guarded against in the U.S. Constitution. Declaring that ...'Kentucky has always been among the first to defend our home and our nation,' the General added, 'bringing the Kentucky National Guard up to full strength is the business of every citizen.'"

"After the ceremonies, presided over by Mayor Glenn Lovern, several hundred people inspected the new building during an open house which was followed early in the evening with a teen dance, while even later an adult dance was held. Mrs. Crawford Clements was crowned 'Queen of the Ball' to climax the evening's festivities."

As evidenced in the above paragraph, the armory at Owensboro has served as both a military and a community center for the city. As one of the oldest armories in the state, the Owensboro armory has a long history of community involvement. The National Guard participates in various parades in the city, including Veterans Day and Christmas. Local high schools, the YMCA, and intramural basketball and volleyball leagues use the drill hall, and the middle school uses the floor for practices. The state police give physical fitness tests in the drill hall, also. In the armory, a karate class meets in a second floor classroom four nights a week.

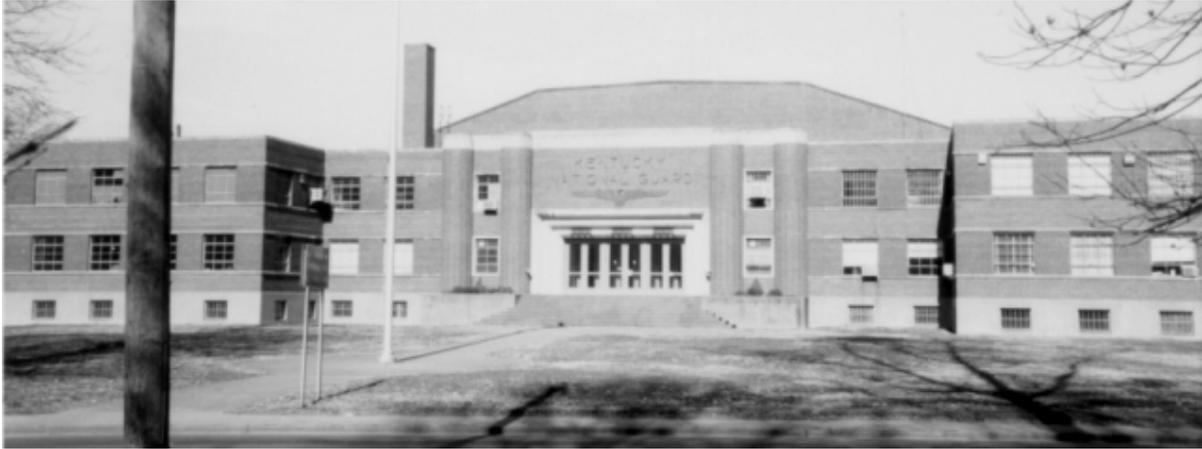
The drill hall/auditorium is also rented to groups for parties, swap meets, and fencing and jousting matches. The high school ROTC, the Boy Scouts, and veterans organizations are other groups which use the armory on a regular basis.

The OMS area, located in the basement, is a separate federal organization. There are a total of four maintenance bays there, and four offices in the north corner. A motor vehicle compound is on the left side of the armory. This area has changed little, with the exception of the wire equipment storage cages which have been added, and the possible addition of more offices in the north corner.

The armories at Owensboro and Ashland are identical in plan, although some of the construction materials and room specifications differ. Rooms have been subdivided in some cases, but overall the two are identical. Both of these armories have served as military and community centers for their respective cities.

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About The Owensboro National Guard Armories



The current armory was completed in 1948, with construction beginning in 1947. The cornerstone of the building was laid on December 5, 1947, by Governor Simeon Willis. The large, two-story brick building on a raised concrete basement is arranged in a U-shape, and is identical to the armory at Ashland with one exception - darker-colored (brown) brick is around the first-and second-story windows at Owensboro. In Ashland, the entire building is constructed of red brick. The armory at Owensboro is set back from the road in a residential area, and has several concrete steps leading up to its three sets of double glass and metal doors. The entrance is flanked by two rounded towers which give the facade an imposing appearance.

Many of the armory's original features are intact. Some additions and alterations have occurred over the years, but these have not adversely affected the armory's historic integrity. A previous armory, located on 3rd Street was used until the current armory was completed. After serving as an armory, the building was used as a milk company, and then demolished in 1994-95.

Credits

Photos and information courtesy Kentucky Heritage Council -- Report No. 25" Inventory and Evaluation of National Guard Armories in the State of Kentucky" - 1999 by Kate Carothers.