

Photo of the Month

206th C.A.A.A.

By Emilee Dehmer, research assistant

Hay Stack with Anti-Aircraft Guns

Dutch Harbor, Alaska

Neg: 018071

Rogers Historical Museum



World War II was a perilous time in the nation's history. President Roosevelt attempted to keep the United States out of the war, but when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, "a day that would live in infamy," going to war could be held off no longer and Americans were called to fight.

The 206th Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft Battalion (C.A. A.A.) was made up of local men who fought in World War II. This unit was first organized from the Arkansas Army National Guard troops in 1917 for service in the First World War. However, they saw no action and were disbanded. By 1940, they were mobilized again for one year as part of the nation's defense efforts. During training in Fort Bliss, Texas, the unit had to compete with another coastal artillery unit to win an assignment to the Philippine Islands instead of being posted to the Aleutian Islands. The other unit was the 200th C.A. from New Mexico. They had a clear advantage in the selection process because most were fluent in Spanish, which would come in handy in the Philippines.

The decision came down to a coin toss. The 200th C.A. won the flip of a nickel and was sent to the Philippines. That loss of a coin toss would prove to be a fortunate thing for the 206th. The 200th C.A. was decimated when the Japanese invaded the Philippines and were forced to participate in the Bataan Death March.

Instead of the Philippines, the 206th was stationed at Dutch Harbor, in Unalaska, Aleutian Islands, Alaska on August 16, 1941. Just four months later Pearl Harbor was attacked and the troops were prepared to fight. The fight came in June of 1942 when the Japanese attempted to overtake Dutch Harbor and the Aleutian Islands. The Japanese pilots bombed the entire harbor and base beginning what was known as the Aleutian Island Campaign. Accounts claim that the pilots were flying so low the soldiers on the ground could clearly see the faces of the Japanese.

The fight lasted just two days, June 3-4, but there were still a number of casualties. Most of those casualties came on the first day when a bomb hit the 864 and 866 barracks killing 17 men from the 37th Infantry and 8 from the 151st Engineers. The Japanese bombers successfully destroyed fuel tanks before attempting to attack the ships in the harbor, the Fillmore and Gillis. The 206th successfully defended the war ships; however the Northwestern, which was a large ship being used to supply power, was hit and destroyed.

The Americans had a major success though in their retrieval of a Japanese Zero aircraft. The Zero was a highly sophisticated device and the retrieval of one allowed for study and invention of better defenses against them. The Aleutian Islands did fall under Japanese control after the battle but were retaken on May 29, 1943 after a Japanese Banzai charge. The American troops fought so well against the Japanese that only 28 of the 2500 Japanese soldiers were alive after the charge. When the city of Kiska was recaptured, the Aleutian Island campaign was finally brought to a close.

In March of 1944 the troops returned to Fort Bliss and the 206th was deactivated. The troops were then reassigned as follows:

1st Battalion: 596th AAA – disbanded after one month

2nd Battalion- 597th AAA – Central Europe and Rhineland deactivate Dec 1945

3rd Battalion: 339th Searchlight Battalion – disbanded after 3 months

After the units were deactivated, most of the former artillerymen became replacements for infantry units.

The heritage of this unit carried over through modern National Guard units. Throughout the years thought the 206th has lost some of its loyal members. Below is a list of the names from World War 2 and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Also included are names from the Killed in Action Monument in Jonesboro.

World War 2:

Private Claude H. Biggs

Private Allen C. Collier Jr.

Private James E. Harrington

Private Hugh Bryan Timberlake

Private James R. Wiles

Private Charles W. Hill

Private Ambrose D. Regalia

Monument in Jonesboro Arkansas:

Kenneth Burkhart

Clifford Cloud
Joseph J. Eble
John H. Franklin
Charles Hutton
Cletis Jeffers
Fred Johnson
James Lemmer
Owen H. Lynch
Carl Neal
Ray Shreeve
Frank Sweeney
Roy Wiles

Operation Iraqi Freedom:
Staff Sergeant Christopher Potts
Sergeant Russell Collier