

Photo of the Month

Arkansas State Guard in WWII



Company G, 6th Infantry, Arkansas State Guard
National Guard Armory, April, 24, 1942
South Eighth Street, Rogers, Arkansas
Neg. # N019631

Hardly a single person that lived through the World War II years was unaffected by the experience. Mobilization of forces to meet the Axis threat impacted many individuals. Over 16 million Americans served in the military. But for many other citizens the war was fought on the home front as well. Industry focused manufacturing on war needs and communities came together to support the effort through volunteer work, bond drives, scrap drives, blood drives, and rationing of food and goods.

Many men deferred from active service in the military due to age or occupation found an opportunity to contribute to the defense of their communities in the State Guard. The State Guard was a distinct military force active between 1942 and 1946, but separate from the National Guard. According to the

Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture, “The Arkansas State Guard was a military force that performed homeland defense, disaster relief, and search-and-rescue duties during World War II while the Arkansas National Guard was in federal service.” As such, these men performed community safety work that would typically be provided by the National Guard during peace time. However, they varied from war time Civil Defense personnel since they also acted as a military unit.

The Arkansas General Assembly originally authorized the formation of the State Guard under Act 85 of 1929. This legislation allowed the State Guard to organize during times of national emergency when at least 75 percent of the National Guard was incorporated into the active duty army. Many other states also organized similar units, which reflected the militia tradition throughout the nation. These militias only reported to the governors of their states and were bound to serve their localities. Federal law recognized this distinction of State Defense Forces and prohibited them from being called as a whole into regular service. This is unlike the National Guard which holds dual duties to both the state and federal governments under the Militia Act of 1903—a step that was necessary to regularize training, organization, and equipment of state forces to quickly and effectively augment the typically small peace time regular army during times of war.

Pictured at right are members of the Benton County unit of the Arkansas State Guard, which was based at the armory on South Eighth Street in Rogers. They originally formed in January 1942 as the Rogers Home Guard shortly after Battery F of the 142nd Field Artillery Battalion of the National Guard was federalized. The State Guard soon organized to fill the gap under the command of Colonel Hendrix Lackey. As part of the organization, the Rogers Home Guard became Company G, 6th Arkansas Infantry Regiment. The company provided 60 men of the 1,500 man statewide force. Generally organized as an infantry unit with attached medical personnel, each company of the State Guard usually contained 50 men commanded by a captain and two lieutenants. The statewide average ages of these soldiers were between 32 and 41. But the ages of the men serving in Company G ranged from 18 to 50.

They also reflected the militia tradition by electing their officers. R.L Vogt was elected captain and Edwin Mackey and Maurice Deason were appointed as lieutenants. Company G is shown in 1942 at the Rogers Armory in the picture at right. The Arkansas State Guard insignia is painted on the wall behind them. This insignia was also worn by members of the Guard as an embroidered unit device on the left shoulder. The unit attended weekly drills, but were only paid for their service while responding to emergencies or in annual training camps. Although our records are incomplete, some of the other known members of the company included Louis Brown, Jeff Duty, Lewis Lee, Jacob Green, Charles Bender, Herschel Back, Ralf Bender, Joe Bross, Roy Harris, Jack Slyter, Erwin Funk, and Thomas Keeling.

In 1942 the Rogers unit served in disaster relief efforts after a tornado struck Berryville and assisted in 1943 in the search for a missing child in Searcy County. They also supported large-scale deployments of the State Guard in response to other weather related emergencies during the war. The State Guard was disbanded on December 16, 1946 with the return of National Guard units to local control. Although it has not been reactivated since the end of World War II, it is interesting to note that it may be reactivated under state law during times of emergency.