

The U.S. Army Artillery Museum, Fort Sill, Oklahoma

By Gordon A. Blaker

On June 2, 2009, the U.S. Army's newest museum opened at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The U.S. Army Artillery Museum is housed in a new 38,000-square-foot building, which tells the story of the "King of Battle" from 1775 to the present day. Inside the museum are 70 large artifacts (macro-artifacts) including cannons, howitzers, mortars, ammunition vehicles and self-propelled artillery pieces. Also on exhibit are a number of uniforms, small arms, flags, head-gear, accouterments and insignia with new exhibits being added monthly.

In early 2009, the new museum was split off from the Fort Sill National Historic Landmark and Museum, which was begun in 1934. Fort Sill, established in 1869 by General Philip Sheridan, is the best-preserved Army Indian Wars era fort west of the Mississippi. One of several reasons for the creation of a separate museum for artillery was the impossibility of getting large artillery pieces into any of the 27 historic buildings which make up the older museum. Interestingly, field artillery was the only branch of the U.S. Army without a museum of its own to train soldiers on their history and heritage. The museum uses the name Artillery Museum rather than Field Artillery because it interprets all types of U.S. Army artillery including siege, heavy and coastal.

The U.S. Army Artillery Museum is located just inside the Key Gate entrance of I-44 at Fort Sill. The fort is next to the ancient Wichita Mountains in southeastern Oklahoma, one hour and fifteen minutes southeast of Oklahoma City. In addition to the two museums on Fort Sill, the Museum of the Great Plains and the Comanche Nation Museum are located in adjacent Lawton.



Upon entering the front doors, visitors are in the Central Gallery and come face to face with a life-sized diorama of a Flying Battery in action during the Mexican War. While the gunners load a M1841 6-pounder gun in the foreground, a second gun with its limber is being pulled into position by a six-horse team. To the left, a lieutenant on horseback directs the action of his guns. Behind the diorama is a 32-foot-high collage of artillery images surrounding a 14-foot tall American eagle above a crossed cannon insignia. The Central Gallery is set up to provide visitors a look at each of the four main components of the artillery—guns, rockets/missiles, forward observation and fire direction. The first U.S. Army rocket launcher used in World War II combat



Front of the U.S. Army Artillery Museum and M107 175mm self-propelled gun.



The view upon entering the museum with the Mexican War Flying Battery diorama in front of artillery wall.



WWI German Mast Periscope used for artillery observation.

is here. Representing the forward observer is one of only two surviving World War I German mast periscopes with an arm that telescopes up to 85-feet in the air. An exhibit case houses all of the equipment used by a fire direction center during the Vietnam War. A recent addition to the gallery is the ultimate artifact of the Cold War era—three sections of the Berlin Wall.

The visitors continue their tour in the South Gallery, which houses the artillery of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The early history of artillery is told on five wall panels surrounding a 16th century breach-loading swivel gun. An alcove houses the beginning of American artillery in the American Revolution. A British 24-pounder siege cannon captured at Saratoga sits in the center positioned for visitors to see the cipher of King George II and the date 1748. Among the guns is the first howitzer cast by N. Byers in 1776 and a French 4-pounder field gun. The exhibition continues with artillery of the Federal era including both types of the King howitzer and a bronze swivel gun. Iron and bronze cannons sit side by side to explain why most early American artillery was cast in iron. The uniforms and equipment of artillerymen are on exhibit with reproductions of the first light artillery battery in 1808, the War of 1812 and the Seminole War. The museum's oldest original uniform on



French 4-pounder Field Gun and Continental Artillery Officer.



Two types of King Howitzers, 1793.

exhibit belonged to a light artillery officer who graduated from West Point in 1819. The first Army rocket launcher, the Hale, used in the Mexican War sits next to the gun of the frontier, the M1841 Mountain Howitzer.

The Civil War section is large, as befits its importance in the evolution of American artillery. In addition to all of the widely used artillery pieces are a number of rarer ones including a muzzle-loading Whitworth, or a Wiard Rifle, a Confederate 3-inch bronze rifle and an Iron Napoleon. Originals of all five of the uniforms worn by Union artillerymen are on exhibit. Siege artillery is represented by a massive 30-pounder Parrott Rifle on a reproduction siege carriage. Plans are under way to add small arms and artillery implements to the exhibit before the end of 2011. There are a number of exceptional battery flags and regimental colors on exhibit including the flag of the first Flying Battery in the Army, Battery C, "Ringgold's" of the 3rd Artillery.

One of the museum's most popular pieces is the legendary "Mule Gun." Developed in the 1880s, this 1-pounder was intended to be fired from the back of a mule. A narrative



M1841 Mountain Howitzer, Hale Rocket and portraits of Major Lucien Webster and his wife Frances.



View of the Civil War area of the South Gallery.



30-pounder Parrott Rifle.



Rare Confederate Iron 12-pounder Napoleon made by Tredegar Foundry, 1864.



Civil War flag of Ringgold's Battery C, 3rd Artillery.



Tredegar Bronze 3-inch Rifle made for the State of Mississippi in 1861.

of the test reported that “mule and gun were knocked ass over teakettle into a nearby river.” The unfortunate mule next to the gun was mounted on a zebra form giving it a comical appearance to anyone who has ever seen a real mule.

The Prussian-inspired uniforms and helmets of the 1870-1890s are shown next to the more practical sack coat



The 1-pounder Mule Gun, put a cannon on a mule and fire it—what could possibly go wrong?



World War II German K-18 170mm Gun.



Hotchkiss Revolving Cannon.

and campaign hat. A Gatling Gun provides an introduction to its big brother, the Hotchkiss revolving cannon. This gun has five 37mm rotating barrels that provided awesome fire support in the 1880s. Other guns of the late 19th century on exhibit include the Hotchkiss and Vickers-Maxim pack howitzers. The last artifact in the South Gallery is an M1885 Funeral Caisson and Limber used at West Point for decades before carrying President Franklin Roosevelt in 1945.

The tour continues in the North Gallery with the 20th century beginning with the revolutionary M1897 French 75mm, the first gun with a new recoil system which eliminated the need to re-aim the gun between shots. Next to the French 75 is the American 3-inch gun. Introduced five years after the French 75, it was out-classed by the French gun and only used in training during the war. Along with other guns of World War I are the original uniforms, equipment and small arms of artillerymen in the war. One of the first prime movers of artillery, the M1917 Holt 10-ton tractor is exhibited pulling a trailer with a gun and limber on it. Along the wall are experimental guns including a 4.7-inch gun motor carriage from 1922.

World War II is well represented and includes all the most widely used American guns and some rarer ones, like the M8 Howitzer Motor Carriage (HMC), Japanese Type 92 70mm gun and the T-66 4.5-inch Rocket Launcher. The world's sole surviving M12 155mm Gun Motor Carriage is here. In the race across France in 1944, the M12 was the only heavy artillery able to keep pace with the armored divisions. The gun earned its nickname "Doorknocker" when its ability to defeat 7.5 feet of reinforced concrete proved useful on the Siegfried Line fortifications. Only 100 M12s were made and they were so heavily used in Europe that after the war they were scrapped. Considered by visitors to be the highlight of the gallery is the Battle of the Bulge diorama featuring a M7 "Priest" 105mm HMC and Jeep. The scene portrays a battery commander delivering ammunition to one of his guns during their encirclement near Bastogne. A ramp allows visitors to look inside where the crew is loading the gun.



M1922 4.7-inch Gun Motor Carriage, "Slo Poke".



The sole surviving M12 155mm Gun Motor Carriage of WWII.

The Korean, Vietnam and Cold wars are represented by many of the same artillery pieces which entered service during World War II. Re-designated in the 1950s, the 105mm M101 and the 155mm M114 remained in service for decades. The prototype of the Vietnam War M102 105mm Howitzer is on exhibit. Artifacts of these three wars include uniforms, equipment and small arms. The first fire direction computer and a number of recent computers line a 40-foot section of the wall. The Q-4 radar used during the Vietnam War represents the relatively new field of using radar to find the source



The Battle of the Bulge diorama with M7 "Priest" 105mm Howitzer Motor Carriage, Jeep and German Airborne 75mm Recoilless Gun.

of enemy mortar and artillery. The history of rocket and missile rocket is represented by a massive training model of the Pershing 1A Missile used at the Artillery School.

The last section of the museum connects the visitor to the present day. The center piece is the prototype of the new M777 light-weight howitzer now in use with both Army and Marine artillery. A mannequin wearing the uniform and equipment of a soldier today stands next to the gun surrounded by examples of the munitions used by the M270 Multiple Rocket Launch System (MLRS).



One of the World War II small arms cases.

North of the museum is the newly completed Artillery Park where the remainder of the museum's 20th century artillery is on exhibit. The park consists of concrete pads linked by a winding sidewalk built for 85 pieces of artillery from World War I to the present. The M65 280mm Gun, "Atomic Annie," which fired the first nuclear



Prototype of the new M777 155mm light-weight Howitzer in the Current Operations area.

artillery projectile in 1953, is there along with the two heavy lifting trucks that carried it. Among the many other interesting pieces are the M1 240mm Gun on two transport wagons used for moving the barrel and carriage of the massive gun separately. German artillery on exhibit include 10 World War I German guns, a German K-18 170mm Gun and a Mörser 18 210mm Howitzer. Foreign artillery pieces on exhibit include: Japanese, Austrian, Czechoslovakian, Russian, British and French. Later this year the museum plans to receive its World War II German 150mm Self-Propelled Howitzer, the Hummel.



M65 240mm Gun "Atomic Annie" with its two heavy lifting trucks.

The museum is beginning fundraising to build an expansion of its Central Gallery and is continuing to acquire and restore additional artillery pieces. Several new exhibits are being planned for installation in the near future. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sundays 12:00 to 5 p.m. For additional information call (580) 442-1819 or visit the website by searching for U.S. Army Artillery Museum or <http://sill-www.army.mil/FAMuseum>. The museum is also on Facebook.