

World War II

Four Arkansas National Guard units saw service in World War II, and all were called to duty before the start of the war on December 7, 1941.

The first unit called to active duty was the 154th Observation Squadron on September 16, 1940. After extensive stateside training, the majority of the squadron departed New York City and arrived in North Africa November 8, 1942. The airplanes arrived in early December, having flown from Florida to South America and across the Southern Atlantic via Ascension Island to Africa. Only 23 of 36 planes that started the trip arrived in North Africa.

Flying A-20s, P-38s, P-39s and P-51s, the 154th flew combat missions from several airfields in North Africa. The 154th is credited with flying the first combat mission in a P-51 in the Mediterranean April 9, 1943. The squadron moved to Bari Airdrome east of Naples, Italy in February 1944. There the 154th flew combat missions all across Europe until the end of the war. The squadron earned a distinguished unit citation for its service in operations over the Ploesti oil refineries in August 1944 .

The 153rd Infantry Regiment was ordered to active duty December 23, 1940 and spent the next 10 days at what is now the University of Central Arkansas. The 153rd then moved to Camp Robinson and completed basic training. Moving to Camp Forrest, TN, the regiment spent six week in maneuvers and returned to Camp Robinson for a few days of leave before shipping out to Camp Murray, WA August 20, 1941. The 1st and 3rd Battalions were then posted to Annette Island and Seward, Nome and Yakutat, Alaska. The 2nd Battalion was stationed on Umnak Island, west of Dutch Harbor and took part in the occupation of Adak Island and the assault on Kiska. The 153rd returned to Camp Shelby, MS March 21, 1944 and was deactivated on June 30th and its soldiers assigned as replacements. Many returned to Camp Robinson as cadre.

The 206th Coast Artillery Regiment (Anti-aircraft) was ordered to active duty December 31, 1940 and began moving to Fort Bliss, TX in early January 1941. After extensive training, the 206th left Fort Bliss in August and arrived at Dutch Harbor, Alaska August 16, 1941. In June 1942 the 206th participated in the defense of Dutch Harbor against two attacks by carrier based Japanese planes. The regiment returned to Fort Bliss in March of 1944, deactivated and headquarters personnel were reassigned. The 1st Battalion was redesignated the 596th AAA (automatic weapons), but was broken up after a month and its personnel used as replacements. The 2nd Battalion was redesignated the 597th AAA (automatic weapons) and participated in the Central Europe and Rhineland campaigns. The 3rd Battalion, which was created in Alaska, was redesignated the 339th Searchlight Battalion, but was disbanded in less than three months and its personnel used as

The 142nd Field Artillery Regiment was ordered to active duty January 6, 1941, moved to Fort Sill, OK where the 3rd Battalion was disbanded. In February the Regiment moved to Camp Bowie, TX and began extensive training. On February 25, 1943 the 142nd Field Artillery Regiment was disbanded. The headquarters was redesignated the 142nd Field Artillery Group, the 1st Battalion became the 936th and the 2nd became the 937th. These were independent battalions equipped with the 155mm howitzer.

The 142nd FA Group left Camp Bowie September 25, 1943 and arrived in England on November 3, 1943. It crossed Utah Beach June 10, 1944 and participated in the European offensive with up to five battalions attached. When the war ended it was 25 miles from the Elbe River.

The 936th left Camp Bowie August 9, 1943, arrived in Algiers September 2, 1943 and landed in Naples, Italy November 11, 1943. It participated in the drive across the Rapido River, the liberation of Rome and the assault on Mount Cassino. When the war ended the 936th was across the Po River, about 45 miles from Venice. It had fired 139,364 rounds in combat and was awarded battle streamers for the following campaigns: Naples-Foggia; Rome-Arno; North Appenines and Po Valley.

The 937th left Camp Bowie on August 10, 1943, arrived in Algiers September 2, 1943 and landed in Naples, Italy November 11, 1943. It participated in the drive across the Rapido River and the liberation of Rome. It then prepared for and participated in the amphibious landings in southern France August 15, 1944. One of vessels carrying the 937th was hit by a German bomber resulting in 1 KIA, 2 MIA, 83 WIA and the loss of the fire direction equipment and one battery of howitzers. The 937th fired over 200,000 combat rounds and was awarded battle streamers for the following campaigns: Naples-Foggia; Rome-Arno; Southern France (with arrowhead); Rhineland and Central Europe.