

Joe B. Alford Collection of Military Insignia

A unique collection of 164 distinctive military unit insignia, reflecting some of the heraldry of the United States military forces from the Revolutionary War to the Space Age, was assembled by Joe B. Alford primarily at the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, during 1942 and 1943.

Joe Alford was reared in North Texas and was graduated BBA from Texas Tech University in 1939. He enlisted in the 133rd Field Artillery, Texas National Guard, in November, 1940. He was appointed to the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School in early 1942, where he attended Course No. 8; upon graduation in April, he was commissioned Second Lieutenant and retained on the staff of the School for a year as an administrative officer for incoming classes. Through very rapid expansion, the OCS soon had some 6,000 officer candidates as enlisted men taking three-month courses. Upon graduation, they were commissioned as officers but did not return to their former units, and thus did not need the insignia of those units. Alford worked with four classes in the year and made a collection of insignia which new officers gave him;

this grew to 142 separate insignia.

The collection was arranged in a new display in 1989, as pictured above. The left panel holds 80 insignia from Field Artillery Battalions and Regiments; the right panel holds 16 additional Field Artillery insignia, and 46 insignia from units of Infantry, Cavalry, and several other branches of the Army—all of which were designed prior to World War II. The right panel also holds 18 insignia from present day Air Force, Space Commands, and other units now on active duty. Each insignia is mounted on foam core board in a two inch square, above its name and home state. The center panel presents the history of the collection, data on military heraldry/insignia, and how insignia design has changed recently.

The collection has been donated by Alford to the United States Military Academy at West Point. In accepting the gift, Lieutenant General Dave R. Palmer, Superintendent of the Academy, stated, "We at West Point are delighted by your kind offer to donate your extensive and handsomely mounted collection of military unit insignia to the United States Military

Academy. The insignia, many representing Army organizations which are no longer active, would be a significant and valued addition to our museum holdings." It is anticipated that the collection will be moved to West Point sometime in late 1991 and will possibly be placed in a facility now being developed at the Academy.

Following his assignment at Ft. Sill, Alford served 3 years in the 71st Division Artillery, including combat in Europe, and was released from active duty in 1946 in the grade of Major. He earned an MA degree from Stanford University in 1947, then served 19 years as manager of the Society of Petroleum Engineers in Dallas, and 13 years as manager of the Society's parent group, the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers, in New York City. Now retired, he and Mrs. Alford reside in Colorado Springs.

[Editor's note: I wish we could print in color. This collection is very beautiful and impressive!] ♦

