

Traditions and History



Wyoming Army National Guard Soldiers
pose with their Hotchkiss guns,
Aug. 24, 1898

Wyoming's most recognized symbol defines the state. It appears on every license plate, on every University of Wyoming football helmet, and on every howitzer, C-130 and UH-60 of its National Guard. It symbolizes the Frontier Spirit and the feisty nature common to the state and its 500,000 residents. The spirit depicted by that one simple image represents a common Wyoming heritage; a heritage mixing can-do attitudes with military might.

The Birth of a Horse

During World War I, military units were ordered to design an identifying symbol that could be stenciled onto its equipment. George N. Ostrom, a Sheridan, Wyo., cattle rancher and a Wyoming Army National Guard supply sergeant was with E Battery, 3rd Battalion, 148th Field Artillery Regiment, 66th Field Artillery Brigade and his unit was right, smack dab in the middle of the fight in France.

"At this time we were in intensive combat and my battery commander asked me how we could possibly comply with this request," Ostrom wrote in a letter dated 1973. "My reply was to detail me to Brigade H.Q. and this could be done." That's exactly what his commander did. "With thoughts of home, Wyoming, a cowboy state, would be proud of a design of a bucking horse and with it the future generation would be equally proud of its origination and its patriotic part it would have," Ostrom wrote. His design was of a rider on a rough silhouette of a horse surrounded by a circle. Ostrom wrote: the commander of the 66th Artillery Brigade was so taken by the design, he cancelled all of the other designs and had all of the equipment marked with the "Bucking Bronco." He returned to the 148th, which became known as the Bucking Bronco Regiment from Wyoming.

That design stuck with the Wyoming National Guard when Ostrom and the rest of Wyoming's Guardsmen returned home to the First Regiment Cavalry, Wyoming National Guard, which later became the 115th Cavalry.

Upon return, the horse design went through a few changes. Its name was changed from Bucking Bronco to Bucking Horse and Rider and Ostrom refined the design. That design stayed with the 115th when it became the 115th Mechanized Cavalry and mustered for World War II.

By the time the unit went to Korea in 1950, the unit's designator had changed to the 300th Armored Field Artillery and the Bucking Horse and Rider brand marked its 105mm self-propelled howitzers. The "Cowboy Cannoneers" were in the thick of battle, firing into the on coming wave of Chinese fighters at Soyang.

When the smoke cleared, the 300th left the battlefield as one of the most decorated artillery units in the Korean War, earning two U.S. Presidential Unit Citations, one U.S. Meritorious Unit Commendation, two Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citations, French Croix de Guerre, 12 Silver Star Medals, numerous Bronze Star Medals for Valor, 183 Purple Heart Medals, as well as many other individual and unit awards.

The battle at Soyang was documented as a National Guard Heritage Print titled "Cowboys at Soyang." The Bucking Horse and Rider was there when every shell was fired and every medal pinned. It was also there in a non-military capacity as part of a new tradition of welcome signs.

A New Tradition: Stealing Home

The highway sign welcoming motorists on a road between Montana and Wyoming went with the 300th in an "unofficial" capacity. The "Entering Wyoming" sign, complete with the bucking horse symbol, was swiped by the unit during its convoy to Washington's Fort Lewis.

The next time a Wyoming Army National Guard unit deployed, the 1022nd Medical Company, to Operation Desert Storm, an "Entering Wyoming" highway sign went with the unit. This time the sign was legally procured. When the 1022nd went to Bosnia, another sign, slightly modified went out. This one was autographed by state leaders and command staff. It was proudly displayed at the 1022nd Medical Company's headquarters at Eagle Base in Tuzla, Bosnia.

When the cowboys of the Wyoming Army National Guard were called to Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan, highway signs went with them. The signs marked the cowboys' claim to a piece of a new frontier and continue as a Wyoming Army National Guard Tradition.

"Powder River, let 'er buck"

The Powder River winds through portions of northeast Wyoming and Montana east of the majestic Big Horn Mountains.

Legend has it "Powder River, let 'er buck" was a toast to the river's high waters in Wyoming's portion from a cattleman who crossed it in the spring of 1893. Of course it was used to rally more than military might. "Powder River let 'er buck" was used by Wyoming Soldiers in Manila during the Spanish American War. When those Wyoming lads faced overwhelming odds late at night in the bars of Manila, a cry of "Powder River" answered with "Let 'er buck" meant assistance was on the way.

The first military use of the phrase can be officially traced to the 115th Cavalry in 1924. In 1982, the 115th's successor, the 49th Field Artillery, was granted permission by the Secretary of the Army to use "Powder River" as its motto. It remains the motto of the Wyoming Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 300th Field Artillery.

Wyoming Soldiers were also with the 91st Division, 362nd Infantry Regiment who used it as their battle cry. The current 91st retains the western influence with the "Powder River" as part of its distinctive unit insignia.