



The Old Guard



The 3^d U.S. Infantry, traditionally known as "The Old Guard," is the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the Army, serving our nation since 1784.

The Old Guard is the Army's official ceremonial unit and escort to the president, and it also provides security for Washington, D.C., in time of national emergency or civil disturbance.

The unit received its unique name from Gen. Winfield Scott during a victory parade at Mexico City in 1847 following its valorous performance in the Mexican War. Fifty campaign streamers attest to the 3rd Infantry's long history of service, which spans from the Battle of Fallen Timbers to World War II and Vietnam.

Since World War II, The Old Guard has served as the official Army Honor Guard and escort to the president. In that capacity, 3rd Infantry soldiers are responsible for the conduct of military ceremonies at the White House, the Pentagon, national memorials and elsewhere in the nation's capital. In addition, soldiers of The Old Guard maintain a 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknowns, provide military funeral escorts at Arlington National Cemetery and participate in parades at Fort Myer and Fort Lesley J. McNair.

Along with these duties, The Old Guard presents historic theatrical productions to audiences in the Washington, D.C., area. The Old Guard annually participates in more than 6,000 ceremonies, an average of 16 per day.

Despite this arduous schedule, The Old Guard continuously prepares for its security and infantry missions by conducting year-round training, culminating in a rigorous evaluation of unit tactical proficiency. Because of this, all soldiers are as familiar with traditional infantry or military-police duties as they are with ceremonial duties.

The black-and-tan "buff strap" worn on the left shoulder by each member of the 3rd Infantry is a replica of the knapsack strap used by 19th-century predecessors of the unit to display its distinctive colors and distinguish its members from other Army units. The present buff strap continues to signify an Old Guard soldier's pride in personal appearance and precision performance that has marked the unit for 200 years.

A further distinction of The Old Guard is the time-honored custom of passing in review with fixed bayonets at all parades. This practice, officially sanctioned by the War Department in 1922, dates to the Mexican War in 1847 when the 3rd Infantry led a successful bayonet charge against the enemy at Cerro Gordo. Today, this distinction is still reserved for The Old Guard alone.

1st Battalion, 3^d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard)

The Old Guard's 1st Battalion conducts military ceremonies to honor our fallen comrades and instill confidence in our civilian leaders and the American people in the professionalism of the U.S. Army. On order, 1st Battalion deploys companies into theater to defeat enemy forces in support of the war on terror.

4th Battalion, 3^d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard)

The Old Guard's 4th Battalion conducts ceremonies in order to maintain the traditions of the U.S. Army, showcase the Army to our nation's citizens and the world and to defend the dignity and honor of our fallen comrades. On order, 4th Battalion protects federal property and assists civilian authorities in the National Capital Region in order to limit the effects of attacks or disasters.



The Old Guard

Caisson Platoon



One of the hallmarks of the Arlington National Cemetery funeral procession is the stately caisson pulled by six handsome horses. The horses and their riders are members of the Caisson Platoon of The Old Guard.

During a procession, six horses of the same color, matched into three pairs, make up the team that pulls the flag-draped casket on a black artillery caisson. The riders are dressed in the Army blue uniform with riding breeches and boots with spurs. To the left front of the team, on a separate mount, rides the section chief, who commands the caisson unit.

One of the older customs in a tradition-rich, full-honor funeral is the caparisoned horse. Allowed for a funeral of a Soldier or Marine in the rank of colonel or higher, the horse is led behind the caisson wearing an empty saddle with rider's boots reversed in the stirrups, indicating the warrior will never ride again.



The Old Guard

Continental Color Guard



With a heritage tracing back to the early days of our nation, the Continental Color Guard is a 3d Infantry tradition.

Regimental records show that the color sergeants and the drum major of the 3d Infantry Band wore Revolutionary War-style uniforms at Fort Snelling, Minn., in 1922. A contemporary description stated that the purpose of the unit was 'to recall to the mind of every member of the 3d Infantry the long and honorable history of the regiment...from a period which followed closely upon the Revolutionary War.

The Continental Color Guard Team serves the same function today. The five-man unit is comprised of two armed Guards and three color ensigns, who carry the National Color, the U.S. Army Color, and the Color of their parent unit, the 3d U.S. Infantry "The Old Guard".

The team carries the National Color in the place of honor on the right, the United States Army flag directly to its left, and the 3d Infantry's regimental color on the far left. The armed guards flank the colors on either side and are responsible for protecting the honor of the Star Spangled Banner. The U.S. Army Color bears 172 campaign streamers, representing every campaign in which the Army has participated. The 3d Infantry Color bears 54 campaign streamers, earned by the unit's participation in major conflicts, the Meritorious Unit Citation and two Superior Unit Awards.

The uniforms worn by the Color Team are replicas of the 1784-style infantry uniforms worn by The Old Guard's predecessor, the First American Regiment. The pattern of the uniform for wear by all infantry units of the Continental Army was approved by General George Washington in 1782. It consisted of a blue coat faced with a red collar, cuffs and lapels, white buttons and lining, long-fitting overalls, and a black cocked hat with cockade.

The Continental Color Guard displays the Colors in numerous parades and ceremonies throughout the year. The team has performed in such notable events as presidential inaugurations, the Olympics, and the Super Bowl.



The Old Guard

Commander-in-Chief's Guard

In 1776, Gen. George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental Army, issued an order to select exemplary men for his personal guard. This unit became the Commander-in-Chief's Guard.

Company A of The Old Guard organized an updated version of the Commander-in-Chief's Guard to honor this historically famous unit. The guard is organized as prescribed by Revolutionary War Gen. Baron Friedrich Von Steuben.

The color team bears a duplicate of the flag Washington's headquarters carried throughout the Revolutionary War.

Members of Company A also appear at different times in other historically accurate uniforms once worn by Soldiers. The "tab actors" help to portray to the public the contributions America's Army has made.



The Old Guard

Fife and Drum Corps



Founded in February, 1960, the men and women of The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps carry on traditions that accompanied the birth of our nation. The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps is the only musical unit of its kind in the United States military with the mission to represent the United States Army at military and civilian ceremonies, parades, schools and other functions throughout the nation and world. The Corps showcases the professionalism of the U.S. Army Soldier musician and serves to revive the country's musical heritage.

The musicians of this unit recall the days of the American Revolution as they perform in uniforms patterned after those worn by the musicians of Gen. George Washington's Continental Army. Military musicians of the period wore the reverse colors of the regiments to which they were assigned. The uniforms worn by the members of the Corps are dated circa 1781, and consist of black tricorne hats, white wigs, waistcoats, colonial coveralls, and red regimental coats.

As an official representative of the U.S. Army, the Corps averages approximately 500 performances annually. The Corps has entertained millions of people in major parades, pageants and historical celebrations throughout the United States; and has served America as a goodwill ambassador as far away as Europe, Australia and Canada. Major sporting events the Corps has performed at include NCAA bowl games, NBA games, NFL games including Super Bowl XVI, the Kentucky Derby, the Indianapolis 500, and the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid NY.

In support of the president, the Corps performs at all armed-forces arrival ceremonies for visiting dignitaries and heads of state at the White House, and has participated in every Presidential Inaugural Parade since President John F. Kennedy's in 1961.



The Old Guard

Firing Party



The Old Guard firing party is comprised of one firing party commander and seven Old Guard Infantryman who hold the sacred duty of rendering final honors to military veterans through the precision of a three volley salute.

On the command of “ready” each member of the firing party removes his weapon from the safe position.

On the command of “aim” the butt of the weapon is brought up to the pocket of the shoulder meticulously so that the handgrip rests in the palm of the left hand, and the right hand grasps the small of the stock with the finger on the trigger. The firers then simultaneously turn their heads, keeping them vertical, to look over the barrel of the weapons.

On the command of “fire” all weapons are fired in unison; each firer then return his weapon to the port arms position to await further orders.

On the command of “ready” the firing party charges and releases the charging handle, in unison, seating the second round.

The seven members of the firing party continue to take commands from the firing party commander and execute as one element until the three volley salute to the honored military veteran is complete.



The Old Guard

Presidential Salute Battery



The Presidential Salute Guns Battery, also known as the Salute Guns Platoon, renders honors to foreign dignitaries and heads of state visiting the White House, the Pentagon and other places in the area. It also fires the final salute during funerals for flag officers at Arlington National Cemetery. Not only does this platoon provide ceremonial support, but also the mortar men provide 75-mm mortar indirect-fire support during the tactical training of 3rd Infantry units.

During ceremonies, the platoon fires 3-inch antitank guns mounted on a 105-mm howitzer chassis. Three-man crews, consisting of a watchman (time keeper), loader and gunner, fire at intervals from three to eight seconds, depending on the type of ceremony.

Every summer the Salute Guns Platoon joins the U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own," in performing Tchaikovsky's "Overture 1812" on the National Mall.



The Old Guard

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

The Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery is guarded year-round, 24 hours a day by Sentinels of The Old Guard. The guard is changed in an impressive ceremony at the tomb every half hour April 1 through Sept. 30. During the winter months, the guard is changed hourly.

The Tomb Sentinel crosses the 63-foot walkway in a special measured cadence of exactly 21 steps. The Sentinel faces the tomb for 21 seconds before retracing his steps. The number 21 corresponds to the highest salute accorded to dignitaries in military and state ceremonies. As a gesture against intrusion on his post, the weapon is always carried on the shoulder farthest from the tomb.

Only under exceptional circumstances may the Tomb Guard speak or alter this silent measured tour of duty. Since 1937, the Tomb Guards have never left their post. The Sentinels take pride in maintaining a constant vigil as a way to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their country.



The Old Guard

The U.S. Army Drill Team



The U.S. Army Drill Team has earned international acclaim through its breathtaking routines with bayonet-tipped 1903 Springfield rifles. The team are goodwill ambassadors for the Army and participate in major military and civic functions.

The team's intricate maneuvers are the result of discipline, training and constant practice. The dangerous drills are performed without vocal cadence, command or musical cues. This team supports the Military District of Washington's ceremonial commitments and Army recruiting from its home at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall at Fort Myer, Virginia.

Competition is intense for a place on this elite team, and a vacancy is filled only after months of drill practice. The strength and dexterity to handle the rifle along with a trim, polished military bearing are essential.