



TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

HERE RESTS IN
HONORED GLORY
AN AMERICAN
SOLDIER
KNOWN BUT TO GOD

The steady rhythmic step in rain, sleet, snow, hail, heat, cold, must be uninterrupted. Uninterrupted is the important part of the honor shown.

Recently, while you were sleeping, the teeth of hurricane Isabel came through this area and tore hell out of everything. We had thousands of trees down, power outages, traffic signals out, roads filled with downed limbs and "gear adrift" debris. We had flooding and the place looked like it had been the impact area of an off shore bombardment.

During winds that turned over vehicles and turned debris into projectiles, the measured step continued. One fellow said "I've got buddies getting shot at in Iraq who would kick my butt if word got to them that we let them down. I sure as hell have no intention of spending my Army career being known as the damned idiot who couldn't stand a little light breeze and shirked his duty." Then he said something in response to a female reporters question regarding silly purposeless personal risk.... "I wouldn't expect you to understand. It's an enlisted man's thing." God bless the rascal...

In a time in our nation's history when spin and total b.s. seem to have become the accepted coin-of-the-realm, their beat hearts, the enlisted hearts we all knew and were so damn proud to be a part of, they fully understand that devotion to duty is not a part time occupation. While we slept, we were represented by some damn fine men who fully understood their post orders and proudly went about their assigned responsibilities unseen, unrecognized and in the finest tradition of the American Enlisted Man. Folks, there's hope. The spirit that George S. Patton, Arliegh Burke and Jimmy Doolittle left us... survives.

Soaked to the skin and marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they continued to guard the Tomb. It is not just an assignment; it is the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person. The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.

Interesting facts about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Sentinels of the Third United States Infantry Regiment, "Old Guard".

How many steps does the guard take during his walk across the tomb of the Unknowns and why?

The sentinel marches 21 steps across the black mat, past the final resting places of the Unknown Soldiers of World War I, World War II, Korea, and the crypt of the Unknown Soldier of the Vietnam

War. With a crisp turn, the sentinel turns 90 degrees (not about-face) to face east for 21 seconds. The sentinel then turns a sharp 90 degrees again to face north for 21 seconds. After the moment, the sentinel paces 21 steps north, turns and repeats the process.

Why are his gloves wet?

His gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle.

Does he carry his rifle on the same shoulder all the time, and if not, why not?

No, he carries the rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. A crisp "shoulder-arms" movement places the rifle on the shoulder nearest the visitors to signify that the sentinel stands between the tomb and any threat.

How often are the guards changed?

From 1926 through 1937, the Tomb was guarded only during daylight hours. Ever since 1937, the Tomb has been continuously guarded 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Tomb guards are changed every thirty minutes between 8 AM and 7 PM during the period from early Spring to early Autumn (April 1 through September 30), and every hour between 8 AM to 5 PM the rest of the year. At all other times (i.e., while the cemetery is closed), the guard is changed every two hours.

What are the physical traits of the guard limited to?

For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5' 10" and 6' 2" tall and his waist size cannot exceed 30".

Other requirements of the Guard:

Once the sentinel has completed his or her training, he or she is examined formally for proficiency in performing the duties and in knowledge of ANC. He or she must first pass a written examination of 100 questions about ANC and then be evaluated on proficiency in keeping watch at the Tomb of the Unknowns. Upon successful completion, the soldier is awarded a temporary Tomb Guard's Badge at a ceremony presided over by the company commander. The Badge is one of the Army's higher honors and can be taken away from the soldier if he or she does not continue to maintain the highest military standards.

The shoes are standard issue military dress shoes. They are built up so the sole and heel are equal in height. This allows the Sentinel to stand so that his back is straight and perpendicular to the ground. The soles have a steel tip on the toe and a "horseshoe" steel plate on the heel. This prevents wear on the sole and allows the Sentinel to move smoothly during his movements when he turns to face the Tomb and then back down the mat.

Any soldier wishing to become a sentinel must undergo rigorous training, including several hours a day of marching, rifle drill and uniform preparation, and every tomb sentinel is expected to be completely versed in the history of both the tomb and of Arlington National Cemetery (including knowing how to find the graves of all the prominent person buried in the cemetery).

Although serving as President of the United States qualifies one to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, only two former Presidents are interred there William Howard Taft and John F. Kennedy

The Sentinels Creed:

My dedication to this sacred duty is total and wholehearted. In the responsibility bestowed on me never will I falter. And with dignity and perseverance my standard will remain perfection. Through the years of diligence and praise and the discomfort of the elements, I will walk my tour in humble reverence to the best of my ability. It is he who commands the respect I protect. His bravery that made us so proud. Surrounded by well meaning crowds by day alone in the thoughtful peace of night, this soldier will in honored glory rest under my eternal vigilance.

About the Tomb of the Unknowns itself:

In the center of the panel stands Victory (female). On the right side, a male figure symbolizes Valor. On the left side stands Peace, with her palm branch to reward the devotion and sacrifice that went with courage to make the cause of righteousness triumphant. The north and south sides are divided into three panels by Doric pilasters. In each panel is an inverted wreath.



A guard seen here maintaining the eternal vigilance in a light snow storm



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And with dignity and perseverance
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thoughtful peace of night, this*

Arlington Cemetery, Washington DC

Tomb Of The Unknown Soldier

duty is total and wholehearted. In the responsibility bestowed on me never will I falter. My standard will remain perfection. Through the years of diligence and praise and the support of my fellow soldiers I will walk my tour in humble reverence to the best of my ability. It is he who commands me to do every that made us so proud. Surrounded by well meaning crowds by day alone in the night this soldier will in honored glory rest under my eternal vigilance.



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