

## **TOMB of the UNKNOWN SOLDIER**

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is Arlington National Cemetery's most iconic memorial. Since 1921, it has provided a final resting place for one of America's unidentified World War I service members. Unknowns from later wars were added in 1958 and 1984. The Tomb has also served as a place of mourning and a site for reflection on military service.

The neoclassical, white marble sarcophagus stands atop a hill overlooking Washington, D.C. The sarcophagus is decorated with three wreaths on each side panel (north and south). The three figures on the front (east) represent Peace, Victory and Valor. The back (west) features the inscription:

***"Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God."***

The military guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is changed every hour on the hour from October 1 through March 31, and every half hour from April 1 through September 30.

The Changing of the Guard takes months to perfect but only minutes to perform. The routine is characterized by practiced precision performed by Sentinels who are members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as "The Old Guard." Each element of the routine has meaning, with the number 21 repeated to represent the highest symbolic military honor that can be bestowed: the 21-gun salute.

### **THE CEREMONY**

An impeccably uniformed Relief Commander appears on the plaza to announce the changing of the guard. Soon, the new Sentinel leaves the Tomb Guard quarters and unlocks the bolt of his or her M-14 rifle, signaling to the Relief Commander to begin the ceremony. The Relief Commander walks out to the Tomb and salutes, then faces the spectators and asks them to stand and remain silent during the ceremony.

The Relief Commander conducts a detailed white-glove inspection of the weapon, checking each part of the rifle once. Then, the Relief Commander and the relieving Sentinel meet the retiring Sentinel at the center of the black mat in front of the Tomb. All three salute the Unknown Soldiers who have symbolically been given the Medal of Honor. The Relief Commander orders the relieved Sentinel, "Pass on your orders." The current Sentinel commands, "Post and orders remain as directed." The newly posted Sentinel replies "Orders acknowledged" and steps into position on the mat. When the Relief Commander passes, the new Sentinel begins walking at a cadence of 90 steps per minute.

The Tomb Guard marches exactly 21 steps down the black mat behind the Tomb, turns, faces east for 21 seconds, turns and faces north for 21 seconds, then takes 21 steps down the mat and repeats the process. Next, the Sentinel executes a sharp "shoulder-arms" movement to place the weapon on the shoulder closest to the visitors, signifying that he or she stands between the Tomb and any possible threat.

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## TOMB GUARDS

There has been a Sentinel on duty in front of the Tomb every minute of every day since 1937. The Sentinel's Creed captures the true meaning of their duty:

### **The Sentinel's Creed**

*My dedication to this sacred duty is total and whole-hearted.*

*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.*

Tomb Guards are handpicked and rigorously trained. Each soldier must have strong military bearing, discipline, and stamina, and present an outstanding soldierly appearance. Each Sentinel must be able to flawlessly perform seven different types of walks, honors and ceremonies. They must retain vast amounts of knowledge concerning the Tomb, Arlington National Cemetery, the United States Army, and their unit.

There are six different levels of responsibility:

1. Sentinel: This soldier has the hardest job - standing watch at the Tomb. These soldiers typically have the rank of Private First Class (PFC) through Specialist (SPC), with an average age of 22.
2. Assistant Relief Commander (ARC): A non-commissioned officer (NCO) with the rank of Corporal (CPL) or Sergeant (SGT). Each Relief Commander has two ARC assigned. The average age for an ARC is 24.
3. Relief Commander (RC): An NCO with the rank of Staff Sergeant (SSG), the RC has the greatest responsibility on a day-to-day basis. The RC is not only responsible for conducting the Changing of the Guard, but also for the welfare and morale of the Relief as a whole. In the absence of the Sergeant of the Guard, the RC is responsible for everything that happens at the Tomb. The RC typically has served in two different Army units. The average age is 27.
4. Assistant Sergeant of the Guard (ASOG): The ASOG is typically the senior Staff Sergeant (SSG) in the Platoon. The ASOG has the primary duty of conducting the daily administrative duties, including oversight of the initial training phase for new Sentinels. In the absence of the Sergeant of the Guard, the ASOG assumes those duties and responsibilities.

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5. Sergeant of the Guard (SOG): The SOG is the Platoon Sergeant for the Tomb Guards, and holds the rank of Sergeant First Class (SFC). The primary duties and responsibilities include Presidential Wreath Ceremonies, as well as overall responsibility for the conduct and actions of the Platoon. The SOG has served in many different leadership positions in the Army, and typically has been a Platoon Sergeant once before. The SOG is the most experienced NCO in the Platoon, and has the added responsibility of mentoring and developing the junior NCOs. The average age of the SOG is 30.
6. Platoon Leader (PL) or Commander of the Guard (COG): This duty position has been assigned at various times throughout the Tomb Guard history. When not assigned, the SOG runs the Platoon. The PL/COG duties include administrative functions at both the platoon and company levels, with the primary job to oversee the daily functions of the Tomb. Often, the PL/COG mingles with the crowd in civilian attire to gauge the reaction of the visitors to the performance of the Guards. The average age of the PL is 25, with the rank of First Lieutenant (1LT).

There are three Reliefs assigned to the Tomb Guard Platoon, and the heights are equal on each Relief, with the tallest assigned to the 1st Relief. Each Relief is commanded by a Staff Sergeant and has two "teams", each consisting of an Assistant Relief Commander and 4 Sentinels depending on staffing. The Headquarter Relief consists of the Commander of the Guard, Sergeant of the Guard, and the Assistant Sergeant of the Guard.

- 1st Relief: 6'2" to 6'4"
- 2nd Relief: 6' to 6'2"
- 3rd Relief: 5'11" to 6'