



Members of the Firing Party full honors team, 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), await the order to fire their weapons during a military funeral with full honors in June at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The Firing Party trains consistently to make sure that all members are in sync when they fire their weapons.

# NCOs Embrace Old Guard's Sense of Tradition and Duty

By Martha C. Koester

NCO Journal

## Honor. Privilege. Prestige.

**F**or the 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), presiding over America's fallen is a duty that the 1,600 Soldiers who volunteer for the Army's oldest active-duty infantry regiment are dedicated to carrying out with the utmost precision.

Service in the elite unit, which has served since 1784 and is headquartered at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall at Arlington County, Virginia, means participating in several high profile, yet solemn, duties in the nation's capital. Since World War II, the Old Guard has served as the official Army Honor Guard and escort to the president.

Noncommissioned officers are valued by the Old

Guard for their combat experience and proficiency in soldiering skills. NCOs of the Old Guard lead Soldiers through a diverse set of missions, from ceremonies at the White House to memorial affairs at Arlington National Cemetery. Their professional appearance and conduct sets the standard for the Soldiers in their unit.

NCOs must also meet physical standards, which call for physically fit males to be at least 5 feet 10 inches tall and fit females at least 5 feet 8 inches.

Upon arrival, the demanding Regimental Orientation Program awaits each new member. The three-week course is designed to teach arrivals the Old Guard uniform nuances, rifle movements and marching unique to the unit.

## Final honors

Perhaps the most well-known of duties that Old Guard Soldiers provide is the rendering of final military honors for fallen comrades. For the past three years, Sgt. 1st Class Adony A. Batista has been on hand during Army funerals at Arlington National Cemetery, whether as the Casket Platoon squad leader or most recently as the platoon sergeant for the Firing Party.

Up to 30 funerals take place daily at Arlington National Cemetery, and the Army does about half of those, Batista said.

“Out of everything I have done since I have been in the Army for 13 years, this has been the most rewarding,” Batista said. “We are the last Soldier some of these families see, whether it be here, rendering final honors for service members or at the Tomb of the Unknowns, [so we have to be on point]. We want to offer the families comfort and for them to know that we did our jobs in honoring and rendering services to our fallen service member in the way they are supposed to be honored.”

Aside from supervising Soldiers’ training and offering mentorship, Batista makes sure necessary personnel are available and ready for funeral services. Maintaining ceremonial composure may not be easy when you’re wearing a wool uniform in 90-degree heat with humidity.

“Honestly you get used to it, and you just learn to deal with it,” Batista said. “That’s why as an NCO you make sure your guys are hydrated, but in the summertime it can get pretty bad.”

Three teams are part of the Firing Party platoon a full honors team and two standard honors teams. Military funerals with standard honors include a Casket Platoon, the Firing Party and a bugler, as well as a caisson for service members who have reached the top NCO grade of E-9. In addition to standard honors, full honors military funerals include an Escort Platoon and a military band.

Training is done consistently to ensure all members are in sync when the Firing Party commander orders them to fire their weapons. The intent is for it to sound as if one shot is being fired at the same time, Batista said.

“It’s seven guys firing, but it should only sound as one shot,” he said. “Three volleys for a total of 21 rounds are fired. You will notice that pretty much perfection is our standard or pretty close to that.”

## ‘Come humble’

Coming from operational assignments to the Old Guard has been a learning experience for Batista. He said he still does the same training, but it’s now training for another side of the Army.

“For the most part, you still provide that mentorship to the junior enlisted and help them to grow as Soldiers and NCOs,” Batista said.



Sgt. 1st Class Adony A. Batista has served as the Casket Platoon squad leader and the Firing Party platoon sergeant for the 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). “Out of everything I have done since I have been in the Army for 13 years, this has been the most rewarding,” Batista said. (Photos by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

Though his service in the Old Guard has provided him with a great sense of fulfillment and accomplishment, he has some advice for NCOs looking to join the unit.

“You have to come humble because this is one of the few units because of our makeup that the junior enlisted know the job sometimes better than the NCOs when you first come in,” he said. “So the mentorship, in a sense, not only goes from the top to bottom but bottom to top. Come humble and come ready to learn from your first days at the unit, learning how to march all over again, to learning how to manipulate the sword.”

## Eye-opening experience

For Sgt. 1st Class Lane Duhon, Continental Color Guard platoon sergeant, any NCO who volunteers to come to the Old Guard is in for a unique opportunity to see the Army from a different perspective, he said.

“Leading highly motivated Soldiers who volunteer to be here and being able to see all the other noncommissioned officers and officers who want to be here and want to serve the duty that we are charged with, I think it diversifies NCOs’ careers and it helps them lead better and understand the dynamic of being a leader,” Duhon said.

Duhon credited multiple deployments and former operational assignments for instilling the discipline necessary to serve in the Honor Guard.

“This unit has opened my eyes from those experiences to see the Army from a different perspective from being in an operational unit versus being here and being in a garrison, seeing a program of outreach to the civilian population,” he said. “We’re going to be balancing the military way of life with the civilian way of life.”



Sgt. 1st Class Adony A. Batista has served as the Casket Platoon squad leader and the Firing Party platoon sergeant for the 3rd Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). "Out of everything I have done since I have been in the Army for 13 years, this has been the most rewarding," Batista said. (Photos by Martha C. Koester / NCO Journal)

Hopefully we help the public understand us from our perspective and not a negative media perspective.

"Being a noncommissioned officer in the Honor Guard is a privilege, a unique opportunity to do something different in the infantry world and/or any MOS," he said. "It's a distinct privilege also to honor our fallen and be able to hopefully leave a lasting impression on people we perform for, leaving them with a positive impression of the military."

Duhon will be heading back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and an operational assignment with the 82nd Airborne Division, but his time with the Honor Guard

and "taking part and surveying the most prestigious job in the Army right now" gave him many learning opportunities, he said.

"I think I am going to take a better understanding of how to lead and mentor Soldiers from a 360-degree perspective versus one approach of getting Soldiers ready for combat," Duhon said. "I have also had to learn a lot from Soldiers who have taught me lessons on how to do this job that we do here. Everyone knows a little something extra, so you can learn from everyone here."

■