

Old Guard's NCOs Take Places among Horses, Big Guns in Inauguration Parade

By Martha C. Koester, NCO Journal

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Members of the Joint Honor Guard stand at attention during a early morning rehearsal for the 58th Presidential Inauguration in Washington D.C. The rehearsal was held on Jan. 15, 2017, the Sunday before the inauguration. (Photo by Jonathan (Jay) Koester / NCO Journal)

When the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (the Old Guard) began to gear up for its role in the 58th Presidential Inauguration, all Soldiers knew the meticulous preparation necessary called for all hands on deck. So, the Soldiers of the Presidential Salute Battery and the Caisson Platoon trotted out their big guns and elegant horses and set about getting them ready to take their traditional spots in one of the nation's most celebrated parades.

The PSB, which was founded in 1953 and is the only unit of its kind in the Army, fires cannon salutes in honor of the president, visiting foreign dignitaries and official guests of the United States.





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Ceremonies require a five-man staff and a two-man team for each gun. The staff consists of the battery commander, who initiates fire commands and ensures the proper number of rounds is fired; the sergeant of the watch, who marches the battery into position, controls the firing of the backup gun, and monitors the watchman and his assistant; the watchman controls the timing between rounds and gives the command to fire; the assistant watchman ensures the watchman stays in time; and the counter counts the rounds and signals the last round to the battery.

The cannons have been fired at presidential inaugurations and state funerals since President Ronald Reagan's administration, said Sgt. Cody L. Grunwald, an assistant watchman.

"Our number one task is to give the president his first 21-round gun salute," said Sgt. Jordan Goodman, escort officer. "It is the highest honor that we can render to the president."

The battery will use four vintage, 75mm, anti-tank cannons from World War II mounted on the M6 howitzer carriage.

"It's an honor to lead the Soldiers onto the battery for the Inauguration," said Staff Sgt. Eric Wintzell, the noncommissioned officer in charge. "This is one of the reasons I came to the Old Guard, so that I could render honors to our president."

Caisson Soldiers also take great preparation for their moment in the inauguration spotlight. Preparing the horses for the festivities often begins in the early morning hours, when Soldiers shine brass and perform horse grooming duties.

"We want to show the public that units like ours are still in existence," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan English, operations sergeant of the Caisson Platoon. "We are the last full-time equestrian unit. So, it's important to represent not only ourselves, but the Army as a whole."

Seeing the Soldiers on their elegant and disciplined horses take their place among the military pageantry often wins the Caisson Platoon many adoring parade fans.

"Proud to have the Caisson Platoon, home of the army's oldest and most famous horse, Black Jack, take part in Inauguration Day 2017!" tweeted then President-Elect Donald J. Trump on Jan. 2.

Caisson Platoon Soldiers are thankful for the opportunity to render military honors to the new president in the national spotlight.

"All of our Soldiers are excited to be serving in the parade," said Cpt. Austin Hatch, Caisson Platoon leader. "Whether we are on the side walker detail, helping prepare the horses and tack, or riding in the parade, we are all honored to serve."