



The Fort Carson Mounted Color Guard participates in a change-of-command ceremony welcoming Col. Scott Myers, Commander, 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, on Founders Field, Fort Carson, Colorado, July 26, 2019. The ceremony represents the passing of command from Col. Scott Gallaway to Col. Scott Myers. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Daphney Black)

History and Traditions

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“*To be a successful Soldier, you must know history.*”
—George S. Patton Jr.

This quote is the basis for why military history continues to be studied at all levels of the Army. Recognizing and analyzing events, tactics, successes and failures contributes to developing a better fighting force, weapons and equipment. Over time, historians have studied famous, and not-so-famous, battles the United States has fought as well as those of our enemies.

We have learned from all of the men and women who have gone before us from the fight for liberty in our own backyard to the desert sands of the Middle East. Similarly, in the past ten years we have continued to develop combat techniques designed to address the asymmetric

operating environment, urban sprawl, and jagged mountain terrain of Afghanistan and Iraq. Demonstrating we can learn from recent history, the first Army & Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual was published in 2006 while simultaneously fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, six years later, as we maintain a large presence in Southwest Asia and other regions, the first revision of this same manual as well as all of our doctrinal references are under revision.

Our documented history has also captured events in the Army's past that could have been easily overlooked. All of which were events that had a significant impact on both our Army and our nation. Until President Truman signed Executive Order 9981 in 1946, segregation was openly practiced in the military. The US Army Air

Corps' Tuskegee Airmen, the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion and the 6888th Postal Unit are all well-known African-American units from World War II. Over time there were other smaller ethnic groups such as Asian-Americans (Philippine Scouts) and Native Americans (Navaho Code Talkers) who also proudly served our nation. Up to 1942, women were not allowed to serve in the military but with the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps that quickly changed. In 1943, the WAAC were re-designated as the Women's Army Corps and during World War II over 150,000 women served on both fronts. Later they would serve in Korea and Vietnam until the WAC was deactivated in 1978 and women were fully assimilated into the US Army. Why are these seemingly minor references to our history mentioned, because they had a significant impact on both our Army and our nation's culture and climate?

Equally as important as our Army history but on a completely different level, smaller units possess their own histories known as a lineage. The lineage and honors of a unit include its origin, battles, awards, distinctive unit patches and insignias. The latter two articles mentioned are known as heraldic items. Army history books and websites always include a description of a unit's heraldic items "as they reflect the history, tradition, ideals, mission, and accomplishments." These practices stem from the Middle Ages where color and symbols reflected the heraldry, often family lineage associated with a particular unit. Generally speaking, it helped determine friend from foe. Today the U.S. Army maintains The Institute of Heraldry



Soldiers assigned to the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) and The U.S. Army Band "Pershing's Own", participate in a Twilight Tattoo performance, on Summerall Field, Joint Base Myer Henderson-Hall, Va., May 9, 2019. The performance was hosted by Lt. Gen. Nadja Y. West, the 44th Surgeon General of the United States Army and commanding general, U.S. Army Medical Command. Twilight Tattoo is an hour-long pageant, which showcases the history of the U.S. Army. (U.S. Army photos by Sgt. Nicholas T. Holmes)

(TIOH) that supports the offices of the presidency, the Department of Defense and other federal agencies with its coats of arms, official seals, flags and streamers. These items possess significant value as they help to form an organization's identity which is foundational to the larger culture and climate.

Army uniforms also have a linkage to our organizational history and tradition. A Soldier's uniform represents many facets of Army history from the shoulder insignias, rank insignias, distinctive unit crests and special branch items such as the infantry blue cord.

Many wonder why the light blue trousers of the Army Service Uniform are a different shade of blue than that of the jacket. The difference recognizes the history of Army life out west on the Great Plains during the latter part of the 19th century. The trousers faded because Soldiers packed away their coats while riding their horse or working in the hot sun. Another uniform item often misunderstood is that of the first sergeant's rank. Few first sergeants know that the geometric shape in the center of their rank insignia is a pierced lozenge centered between chevrons and arcs; not a diamond, stripes and rockers as they are traditionally referred to. Another example is that many like to say enlisted Soldiers wear their rank on their sleeves because they do the "heavy lifting" while officers wear their rank on their shoulders because that is where they bear the responsibility of their position.



Soldiers with Bravo Battery, 5th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, fire a 21-gun salute during the Memorial Day ceremony May 23, 2019 at Fort Polk's Warrior Memorial Park. (Photo by Chuck Cannon)

Traditions often go unseen but reside just about everywhere in our daily activities. We honor our fallen warriors in many ways; we say our farewells during unit memorial ceremonies where the fallen are represented by their helmet, boots, ID tags and rifle, they are buried in traditional military fashion with the U.S. flag after being folded and presented according to our tradition and history. There are also symbols such as the playing of “Taps”, firing details, expended rounds/casings placed inside of the flag, and often in many circumstances, full military honors provided at such places as Arlington National Cemetery led by members of the 3rd Infantry Regiment’s “Old Guard” with their horses and caisson. Accompanying this effort are the “Arlington Ladies”, an organization created in 1973, designed so that no Soldier would ever be buried alone. Another less traditional and lasting memory are when Soldiers get tattoos in order to personally honor and remember their fallen brothers and sisters. And finally, organizations never let the memory of their fallen slip away as they pay tribute to them by formally acknowledging their sacrifice at military banquets and balls with the “fallen comrade table”, toast and moment of silence.

One of our newer and very popular traditions is that of the “challenge coin”. Originating in the mid-1980s they were awarded to individuals for their excellent service or achievement and presented by a commander or command sergeant major. They started as small round, bronze in color, metal coins and have grown to playing card size in all shapes, sizes, colors and artwork. They have quickly become something of a collector’s item. Units now have deployment coins, Sgt. Morales coins, promotion coins, etc. It has expanded far beyond the Army to all military services, law enforcement agencies, businesses and yes, the president even has a coin too. Truly one of the most coveted! The important point is never to be without a coin when a “coin check” is called.



Soldiers from various units within U.S. Army Europe stand in formation as they are recognized by U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Abernathy, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Europe, for completing the 2019 Nijmegen Marches earlier this year, Sept. 4, 2019, on Clay Kaserne, Germany. Each soldier personally received a coin from Abernathy for finishing the annual, four-day 100-mile march. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Stephen P. Perez)

No matter where that happens, a Soldier without his or her coin must buy the next round of drinks! This harkens back to days past in Germany when prior to the implementation of the Euro, a “pfennig check” was called. A pfennig was the German equivalent of a U.S. penny but half the size of a dime. Usually they were taped to the back of a Soldier’s driver’s license and held no other significance than as a way to engage at social events.

History, traditions and customs play a significant role in our lives as Soldiers, leaders, veterans, retirees and family members. They ground us in our past while preparing us for the future so that we never forget the men and women who have gone before us and the hard fought lessons that they learned. Through the symbols, memories, always embellished “war stories,” and opportunities to celebrate our successes and our losses we will always remain Army strong! Hooah! ■



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