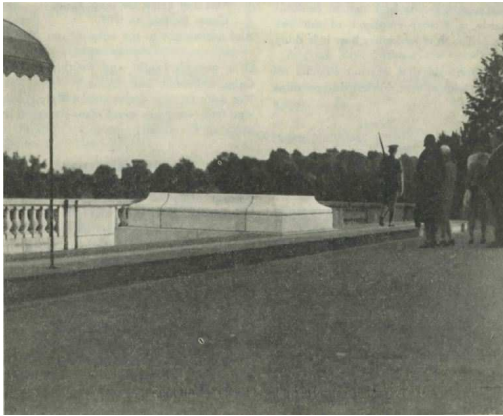


First Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

BY TAPSBUGLER ON MARCH 25, 2021



We see the soldiers of the 3rd US Infantry guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in videos and photos every day. The Old Guard has been performing this mission since 1948. But who started guarding the Tomb after the interment in 1921? Incredible as it seems, there was no military guard in the early years of the Tomb's existence due to resistance to provide Soldiers for this duty.

After the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was dedicated, the spot became a place where Americans gathered to pay their respects and place wreaths and flowers. It also became a place where people gathered to picnic, some even setting up their baskets on the Tomb itself. (This was the time before the large marble cap was placed on top).



Trash along with cigarette butts were commonly found around the Tomb. Photographers also hawked their services to the many who visited the Tomb not only to pay respects but also for the view of Washington from the Memorial Amphitheater. A picket fence was erected to keep people off the Tomb, but this proved to be unsightly.

Requests for a military guard around the Tomb were met with resistance from the War Department. In the years following WWI, budgets were tight and manpower could not be

allocated for guarding the Tomb. Plus, was the response, there was no way to billet Soldiers at the Tomb despite the short distance from Ft Myer. On November 17, 1925 a civilian watchman was placed at the Tomb but their duties only included a daylight watch.

On March 24, 1926, Major General Fox Connor, the Army's deputy Chief of Staff, sent a memorandum to the Adjutant General, explaining: "The Secretary of War desires that orders be issued establishing an armed guard (rifle) at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery.... If practicable, orders should be issued by telephone this afternoon in order that the guard may begin tomorrow morning." Per these orders, the first armed military guard began duty at the Tomb on the morning of March 25, 1926. The 3rd Cavalry Regiment along with the 12th United States Infantry Regiment (both stationed at Fort Myer) began the mission of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on March 25, 1926 replacing the civilian watchman.



During the years the 3rd Cavalry guarded the Tomb, their uniform was marked by the wearing of spurs on their boots. In April 1932, the original Tomb was completed with a large white marble sarcophagus. Originally set as a daylight duty the guard was extended to a 24 hour watch at midnight July 2, 1937. It has remained so ever since.

