

## Chapter 54

# ROLE OF THE 3D US INFANTRY REGIMENT PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

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## Introduction

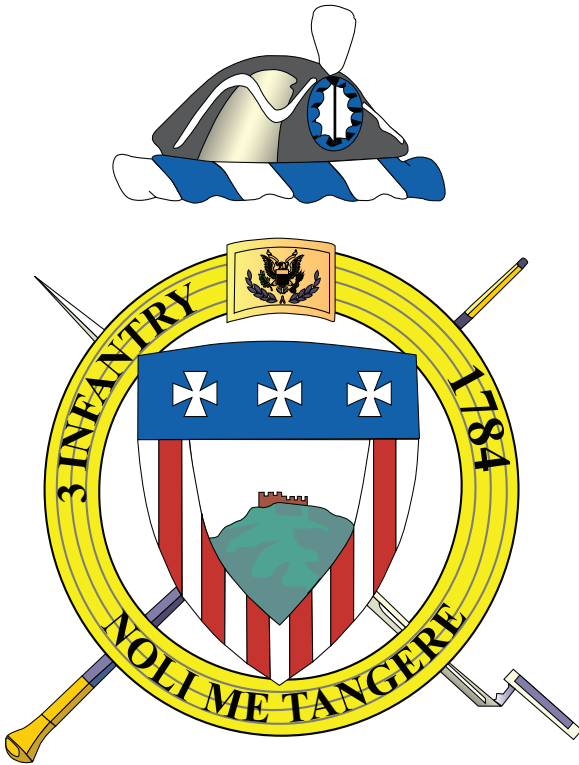
Physician assistants (PAs) assigned to the 3d US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) are presented with the opportunity to perform medical and ceremonial duties in a unique organization located in the national capital region (NCR). Old Guard PAs are responsible for urgent, emergent, and primary care provided to the soldiers of the US Army's oldest active duty infantry regiment (Figure 54-1).

## Unit Background and Structure

The Old Guard traces its lineage to 1784.<sup>1</sup> Currently located at Joint Base Myer–Henderson Hall (formerly Fort Myer) in Arlington, Virginia, the unit has a unique mission and responsibility. In addition to functioning as an infantry regiment, Old Guard soldiers have the privilege of rendering final honors in Arlington National Cemetery and serving as the official Army honor guard and escort to the president of the United States.

The regiment is divided into two distinct battalions, each with its own mission and specialty sections, including the Caisson Platoon, Presidential Salute Battery, Continental Color Guard, US Army Field Band, Fife and Drum Corps, and Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Officers, noncommissioned officers, and junior enlisted soldiers are specially selected to serve in the unit, and leaders are required to have experience at multiple Army units. Each rifle company commander has commanded at least one company before taking a command in

the Old Guard, and is evaluated not only on military proficiency, but also on ceremonial excellence. All soldiers, regardless of rank or duty, must successfully complete the regiment's rigorous ceremonial training program (Figure 54-2). Old Guard soldiers and officers may earn the right to wear the unit-distinctive trimming, known as the "buff strap," on the left shoulder of the dress blue uniform. The black and tan buff strap is a replica of the knapsack strap used by the unit's 19th century predecessors to display its distinctive colors and distinguish its members from other Army units.<sup>2</sup> The buff strap continues to signify an Old Guard soldier's pride in personal appearance and precision performance, which has marked the unit for 200 years (Figure 54-3).



**Figure 54-1.** 3rd US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) crest.



**Figure 54-2.** 3rd US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) formation, December 6, 2019. The Old Guard soldiers take pride in personal appearance and precision performance, which has marked the unit for 200 years.

## **Mission and Task Organization**

The Old Guard's medical platoon provides urgent, emergent, and primary medical care to soldiers of the regiment. The platoon is comprised of a regimental surgeon, two PAs, and 40 noncommissioned officers and soldiers. Each PA is assigned to one of the infantry battalions and supports its unique mission. The PAs are rated by their respective battalion executive officer and senior-rated by their battalion commander; the regimental surgeon serves as intermediate rater. The medical section maintains a regimental aid station located within the regiment's footprint, allowing for rapid treatment while maintaining medical readiness. Physical therapy and a holistic care team schedule appointments and assist with sick call at the regimental aid station to increase access to care for unit soldiers. The Andrew Rader US Army Health Clinic on Joint Base Myer–Henderson Hall provides ancillary services, including laboratory, radiography, and pharmacy support.

As an infantry regiment, the Old Guard is required to maintain mission readiness and worldwide deployability. The unit is ready to defend the NCR in times of increased national security and civil disturbances.<sup>1</sup> The Old Guard has deployed several times in support of global contingency operations and supports public events in the NCR year-round. From the Army Ten-Miler to Independence Day celebrations, soldiers of the Old Guard are at the core of countless public events providing logistical support and security.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Old Guard PAs are responsible for leading, mentoring, and training the regimental aid station staff and medical platoon, providing these personnel with career development and professional guidance (Figure 54-4). Additionally, they have an essential role in guiding and shaping the medical support and readiness training provided to the regiment. Unit PAs also serve as medical advisors to the regimental and battalion commanders on all medical issues, and function as liaisons



**Figure 54-3.** Soldiers of the 3d US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) graduate from the Regimental Orientation Program (ROP), July 21, 2014, at Summerall Field on Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, VA. ROP is designed to train new soldiers in rifle movements, ceremonial marching, and uniform styles unique to The Old Guard.

US Army photo by SPC Cody Wes Torkelson.



**Figure 54-4.** Captain Vince vanderMaarel dons his 3rd US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) service uniform, September 19, 2018. The Old Guard physician assistants are responsible for urgent, emergent, and primary care to the soldiers of the US Army's oldest active duty infantry regiment.

between the regiment and higher levels of the medical system. They provide care for high-visibility units and soldiers such as those who maintain 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the US Army Drill Team, and the Caisson Platoon. They plan, coordinate, and execute medical support for the regiment's high-visibility events through a team approach that encourages communication across organizations.

Medical credentialing and privileging is provided by Kimbrough Army Community Hospital at Fort Meade; Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center are the two higher levels of care within the regional military medical system. Old Guard PAs interact with providers from these and civilian medical facilities in the area to coordinate emergency and follow-up care for their patients.

In addition to providing robust medical care, Old Guard PAs train future generations of PAs through the regimental aid station's candidate evaluation program associated with the Interservice Physician Assistant Program Phase 2 site at the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital.

## **Skills and Attributes**

- Prior operational experience as a battalion PA.
- Rank of captain.
- Graduate of Captains Career Course.
- Must be an excellent role model with the desire to mentor others.
- No prior Uniformed Code of Military Justice violations.
- Applicants should apply through the Human Resources Command assignment officer.

## **Lessons Learned**

Providing medical care to a high-visibility team with a no-fail mission is equal parts rewarding and challenging. Old Guard PAs function in a broad operational paradigm, so adaptive problem-solving is a daily requirement. Whether coordinating medical coverage for a state funeral, briefing senior leaders on emerging epidemics, developing investigative studies to address mission-specific threats, or adjusting to unique mission requirements, Old Guard PAs are at the forefront of Army medicine, often in novel and creative ways.

## **Conclusion**

Providing medical support in the NCR offers unique challenges and opportunities. Medical providers assigned to the Old Guard have an essential role in maintaining readiness while coordinating and conducting care in that complex environment.

## **References**

1. 3d US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) website. Accessed March 17, 2020. <https://www.oldguard.mdw.army.mil>
2. 3d US Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). *Soldier's Handbook*. 3d US Infantry Regiment; May 2019.

