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Commander's Message



State Commander Harold "Butch" Schupska

Comrades and Auxiliary:

First I want to say happy Thanksgiving, and Merry Christmas. I hope to see all of you at Winter Council. As a reminder, the State Commander's and Auxiliary President's Homecoming is going to be on Friday 7 January 2022 from 5 -7 PM.

Now that the first half of the reporting year is over, I want to congratulate those Posts and Districts that reported in all categories, achieving 100%.

As I have been traveling the state I see a lot of good work being done by both the Posts and Auxiliaries. We are starting to notice that more members are showing up to attend Post and District meetings. That is great. Keep up the good work.

As I write this the Department is doing great in all phases of reporting, along with membership, thanks to all the leadership by all members of the Department.

Butch Schupska State Commander 2021-2022



WINTER COUNCIL MEETING January 7 – 9, 2022

REGISTRATION DEADLINE DECEMBER 30TH

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(Hotel Group Rate Deadline is December 6th)**

PRE-REGISTRATION FOR BANQUET TICKET \$45.00

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THERE WILL BE NO TICKETS SOLD AT THE WINTER COUNCIL MEETING.

**VFW DEPARTMENT of VIRGINIA**

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From the Editor's desk

Scholarship and reporting activities are in full swing. Please keep the state of Virginia VFW informed of all your accomplishments, by submitting your articles and pictures to me, for the Virginia Veteran newspaper.

Randy Coker

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We reserve the right to edit all submitted articles for timeliness, clarity and syntax.

Note: Deadline for the next newspaper is:

February 15th, 2022

ALS IS KILLING VETERANS

By Chris Mulholland

“Veterans are developing ALS in rates higher than the general population.” - VA Secretary Dr. James Peake 2008



Do you know that ALS is a significant threat to the veterans' community?

Since 1910, multiple studies have shown that the rate at which U.S. veterans develop amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is twice as high as the American general population. Despite this, there's a shockingly low amount of awareness of the disease among the veteran community.

I should know. I was diagnosed with ALS in November 2020. Before then my only acquaintance with ALS was the “ice bucket challenge”. After my diagnosis, I have made a point to ask every veteran I meet if they're aware of the link between military service and the likelihood of being stricken with ALS. I have yet to meet someone who says they do. That needs to change.

Every day in America, three veterans are diagnosed with ALS while another three die from it. The prognosis for a person diagnosed with ALS today is largely the same as it was 150 years ago – death in two to five years.

Towards the end, you are left almost incapable of communicating with the outside world except through your eyes.

I am a retired Marine and have been athletic all my life. I played soccer, rugby, and ice hockey. I refereed professional soccer and officiated all over the globe. I ran marathons and at the age of 60 was still bench pressing 300 pounds. Now I live in a wheelchair, barely able to lift a spoon to my mouth.

In 2007, Brig. Gen. Thomas “Mik” Mikolajcik, USAF (Ret.), testified before Congress about ALS: *“If these soldiers were dying in the field – rather than quietly at home – we would leave no stone unturned. We would use the best existing resources to make sure they had whatever they needed to survive.”* General “Mik” died from ALS on April 17, 2010.

In 2008, the Veterans Administration (VA) determined that military service is a presumptive causation of ALS for veterans. As veterans continue to reach the ages commonly associated with ALS, the rate of the disease will continue to increase in this population. I am evidence of that.

According to a VA report, 1,055 veterans die from ALS each year. That means that since 9-11 three times more veterans have been lost to ALS than troops killed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan combined (20,895 vs 6,896). Interestingly, the Hampton Roads area of southeastern Virginia – where I and 234,476 of my fellow veterans live – is a “hotspot” for ALS cases.

More ominously, a recent 2019 study revealed that the prevalence of

ALS among the Post-9/11 deployed veterans is 19.7 per 100,000 over 14 years compared to the US national average of 5.2 per 100,000. Even worse, for some Air Force personnel (pilots, aircraft crew, missile, and combat operation staff) the prevalence is substantially higher – 35.1 per 100,000!

And we still don't know why those in uniform bear an outsized burden from this disease.

The good news is that ALS gives veterans an automatic 100% disability rating from the VA. I have nothing but the highest of praise for the support I have received from the VA. From home modifications, to an accessible van, powered wheelchair, medical equipment and more, they have taken care of my every need. If you are diagnosed with ALS, do what I did and immediately contact your nearest VFW Service Officer. You – and your family - don't have any time to waste.

The bad news is that our regulatory process does not keep pace with the urgency of ALS. Drug trials drag on a decade or more when most ALS sufferers do not live nearly that long. A diagnosis of ALS is a virtual death sentence and comes with advice to patients to get their affairs in order and to tick off their bucket list while they still can.

ALS is designated as a rare disease not because so few people get it, but because ALS kills so quickly. As many as 30,000 Americans – approximately 5,000 of them veterans – have ALS, with 5,000 new cases diagnosed each year. However, if ALS patients lived for 10 years after diagnosis there would be 275,000 nationwide, a much more noticeable population.

60 percent of Americans don't know that ALS is *always* fatal. If you know of a veteran who has or had ALS, we need you in this fight. Too often ALS exists in the shadows, and those afflicted pass so quickly they can't speak for themselves. Be their voice.

The veterans' community urgently needs answers and solutions for people with ALS.

I ask the VFW to use their influence and call upon Congress to fund early access to ALS investigational therapies, accelerate therapy development, and increase research on and development of interventions.

We can solve urgent health needs when we put our minds to it. The quick vaccine development during the pandemic proves that. I have already called both Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner. Please do the same.

Our Nation must take all measures to ensure that our military men and women are at no greater risk of ALS than any other Americans.

Before I was diagnosed, I had no idea that ALS so disproportionately affects veterans. I have made it my personal mission to raise the awareness in the veteran community of the severity of ALS amongst us. Please help by telling other vets, friends, family – everyone – about the outsized threat of ALS to those who are or have served in uniform.

I will fight this battle to my dying breath.

Chris Mulholland is a VFW National Deputy Chief of Staff, and Gold Legacy Life member of VFW Post 2894 in Chesapeake

Virginia VFW Honors USS COLE Sailors

By Ken Wiseman, Past State Commander

On October 12, 2000, the USS COLE (DDG-67) was pier side in the harbor of Aden, Yemen for what seemed like a routine evolution: refueling. Sailors on the ship that day recall lunch being served with the normal delay to refill trays in the mess line. There were routine security watches in place consistent with guidance for the time. However, this was not to last.



A small boat packed with explosives and driven by terrorists aligned with Al-Qaeda was driven towards the port side of the ship and the explosives were detonated. 17 Sailors were killed and another 37 injured in the deadliest attack against a U.S. Navy ship since 1987. The attack on the USS COLE, which came 11 months before the attacks on September 11, 2001, is historically seen as yet another action by a terror group that the U.S. continues to fight today. However, those Sailors killed are not forgotten; the VFW ensures their legacy of service and sacrifice is kept alive.

Across Virginia, a number of the Sailors killed are buried. In keeping with the wishes of their families, the VFW honors many with wreaths placed on their graves and by their spot in a columbarium. Each wreath contains 17 white roses for the 17 Sailors killed. Four are buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Another, who had only been on the ship for 60 days and had a pregnant fiancé, is buried in Newport News, just a few miles from where he grew up and near where his mother and the son he never met live today. These Sailors were junior and senior in rank, new and not-so-new by years of service, but all were far from home ensuring the principles of democracy and freedom were well represented.

Leading the VFW's delegation at Arlington National Cemetery was State Senior Vice Commander Geoff Lyster, who was joined by District 10 Commander Robert Adamczyk and Past State Commander Ken Wiseman. Meeting them in Section 60 of the cemetery, where three of the Sailors rest beside each other, was Commander Kirk Lippold, U.S. Navy (ret.) who served as the Commanding Officer of the ship that fateful day.

"We are the VFW, and the VFW never forgets those who served and sacrificed" said State Senior Vice Commander Lyster. "The VFW continues the tradition of placing wreaths and remembering those lost even though

it has been 21 years because the service of these Sailors is still just as honorable, and their loss is still just as painful".

Commander Lippold said he was touched by the continued commitment of the VFW. "It means so much to me personally that you continue to send the wreaths and attend the ceremonies".

The ship, which was later adopted by the VFW's National HQs through its "Adopt-a-Unit" program, was repaired and returned to sea, where she still serves. The ship commemorates the memory of those lost in several ways and holds their own ceremonies annually. Additional wreaths are placed by VFW Posts 4809 and 5500 from Norfolk and Hampton, respectively.

Regardless of the time that may go by, the VFW continues to fulfill its commitment to remember those who serve and sacrifice while in the military as well as their families. The attack on the USS COLE is an event many of us remember well and those Sailors will continue to live on in the minds and hearts of both their families and all of us.

Patrick Wayne, Coast Guard veteran Fighting for a Cause

Submitted by Greg Eanes, Post 7819



Pat Wayne, now 82-years young, is known to most folks as the son of American movie legend John Wayne and to later generations as ‘Sinbad’ in the 1977 “Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger”. He is also an American veteran having served as radarman in the United Coast Guard. And he is still fighting for a cause.

In 1961, Wayne wanted to earn a commission in the Coast Guard which, at that time had a three-month commissioning program followed by six months of active duty and a Reserve obligation. “They were filled up,” he said on Veterans Day at the Williamsburg Nostalgia Festival, “so I did the enlisted program which turned out to be the smartest move. The guys in boot camp were great. Three or four of the guys from boot camp – one of them has died -- are still my closest friends.”

Wayne trained as a radarman, performed six months of active duty then he entered the Coast Guard Reserves, serving for eight years. “We tracked surface ships and did a lot of search and rescue.” Wayne, serving on a number of ships over the years, participated in multiple rescue operations along the Pacific Coast down to Mexico.

“One time we were pulling in two lines when two whales jumped out of the water during mating season,” he said. ‘That’s a site I’ll never forget.’

“Because of my work I could not do the normal one weekend a month and two-week routine, so I was in a program that allowed me to perform my annual duty for 30 days straight,” he said. He said he would try pick his ships so that he could visit a variety of ports in the Pacific.

While he is no longer in uniform, Wayne is still fighting for a good cause: to defeat cancer. He said, “Our mission is to find a cure for cancer. Cancer hits home nearly everywhere.” After his father’s passing, he became chairman of the John Wayne Cancer Institute (JWCI) now the John Wayne Cancer Foundation.

“We do really good work,” he said. The money he earns from personal appearances and memorabilia sales goes directly to support the John Wayne Cancer Foundation which is engaged in pioneering cancer research and programs.

This includes funding the JWCI Surgical Oncology Fellowship Program “which is revolutionizing cancer treatment worldwide”. The objective is to “train the surgeons of tomorrow in the latest techniques and technologies for treating and researching cancer.”

These specialists take leadership positions at cancer centers and academic institutions across the country. They fund grants to further cancer research initiatives and initiated the ‘Block the Blaze’ program, focused on educating young people about the importance of skin cancer prevention and early detection.

To learn more about or make donations to the John Wayne Cancer Foundation, visit www.johnwayne.org or on Facebook at JohnWayneCancerFoundation.

Manassas Post loses a distinguished member

Merle Hancock May 23, 1924 — September 18, 2021



SUBMITTED PHOTO



STEVE HEBLER / THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

World War II Air Force veteran, Ernest Merle Hancock, center, smiles as he is awarded the Silver Star from Maj. Gen. James Post, of the U.S. Air Force Air Command, Langley AFB, during the House session at the Capitol in Richmond on Friday, March 7, 2014.

World War II veteran describes experience

Posted By: What's Up Prince William on: November 13, 2018

Seventy-five years ago, Ernest Merle Hancock joined the United States Army Air Forces. The World War II veteran and Manassas resident told What's Up Prince William about his experience. In the years that followed his enlistment, Hancock embarked on several missions.

"We flew in such places as Germany, France, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania," the 94-year-old said.

Hancock, a technical sergeant, was a turret gunner and flight engineer on a B-17 Flying Fortress. Ploesti, Romania was the most difficult target. "It was the largest oil refinery in the world, so it was better protected than anything else in the world," Hancock said.

However, it was his 37th mission that changed the course of his military career. On June 18, 1944, 200 German fighter aircrafts confronted Hancock's unit. "I was fortunate enough that I shot down three Focke-Wulf 190 and Me [Messerschmitt Bf] 109s, and today I hold a Silver Star for that," Hancock said. The attack forced him to parachute from 23,000 feet.

Soon afterward, the German Gestapo caught and interrogated Hancock, who was placed in the Stalag Luft IV Prisoner of War Camp. As Allied forces made progress toward the camp in February 1945, the prisoners were expected to march until they were freed two months later.

Because of his bravery, Hancock earned the Silver Star, the third-highest honor for military members. He received the Silver Star and a commending resolution from the Virginia General Assembly in March 2014.

Merle was a WWII veteran who was awarded the Silver Star, the nation's third highest decoration for heroism, the Purple Heart, and four Air Medals. On his thirty-fourth mission, as a top turret gunner, over Germany, Merle's B-17 aircraft was shot down and he was taken prisoner. T/Sgt. Hancock would spend nine months as a POW in Stalag Luft IVB before being liberated in May 1945. Prior to being liberated he and other POWs were marched for over two months through Poland and Germany in an attempt to keep he and others from being liberated.

Merle often spoke to schools, and veterans groups about his experiences as a Prisoner of War. He never refused a request and enjoyed spending time with fellow veterans. He will be missed by all of us who knew him.

The citation for Merle's Silver Star Medal reads as follows:

"On 18 July 1944, Sergeant Hancock participated in a bombing mission against a vitally important enemy airdrome in Germany. In the target area his group was attacked by approximately two hundred (200) aggressive enemy fighters, and, in the ensuing engagement, his aircraft was severely damaged and set on fire, and Sergeant Hancock was severely wounded about the legs. Despite intense pain, shock and loss of blood, Sergeant Hancock gallantly remained at his guns in the heroic defense of his crippled aircraft against the overwhelming enemy attacks. With outstanding skill key successfully destroyed three (3) of the attacking aircraft. Even when flames from the burning aircraft menaced is safety and inflicted severe burns on his legs and hips, Sergeant Hancock courageously remained at his post in the defense of his plane. Only when ordered to abandon the burning aircraft did Sergeant Hancock leave his guns and bail out."

Submitted by Jerry Martin, Post 7589

VFW Urges Citizens to Remember Sacrifices of Former Prisoners of War

Submitted by Greg Eanes

Crewe's Gold Star Memorial Post 7819 invited the public's attention to September 17th as National POW/MIA Recognition Day.

Post Commander Greg Eanes says research shows at least 15 Crewe-Burkeville area veterans as having been prisoners of war during World War II. The most at any time other than the American Civil War when many Nottoway County veterans were held in Northern prison camps.

During the Vietnam War, Navy Commander Paul E. Galanti captured in Vietnam, was closely tied to Nottoway County. That connection was through his wife, the late former Phyllis Eason whose father was at Camp Pickett where she spent much time. "While Commander Galanti had no roots here, he and Mrs. Galanti were very much adopted by Nottoway County," said Eanes. "Her work in POW/MIA affairs and the National League of Families set a standard yet to be matched in working for the welfare of American POWs."

Another former Vietnam POW, Colonel Ronald J. Webb, was connected by marriage to a Crewe family and visited in years past. Both men are now retired.

Eanes encourages citizens to take a moment to reflect on the hardships suffered by Americans held in wartime captivity and use the annual remembrance as an opportunity to educate young citizens, so they understand that freedom is not free; that men and women have sacrificed for it, sometimes while in the hands of an enemy.

Table 1 - Area World War II Prisoners of War

Name	Date of Capture	Unit	Campaign
Mortimore, C.G.	1942 April 6	Provisional Air Corps Infantry-Bataan	Bataan
Bradshaw, Jack	1942 May 6	59th Coast Artillery Regiment, Battery Wheeler	Corregidor
Slate, Charles H.	1943 July 11	(no unit information)	Caserta, Sicily
Oliver, Warren	1944 Jan 11	91st Bomb Group, 332nd Bomb Squadron	Air War-Europe
Honeycutt, John S.	1944 Jan 4	384th Bomb Group, 547th Bomb Squadron	Air War-Europe
Marsden, William M.	1944 June 14-18	4th Division, 8th Infantry Regiment (I&R Platoon) (escaped)	Normandy
Hudnall, Roy G., Jr.	1944 June 15	9th Division	Normandy
Pond, John Dan	1944 March 8	338th Bomb Group, 560th Bomb Squadron	Air War-Europe
Graham, Charles J.	1944 Sept 27	445th Bomb Group, 702nd Bomb Squadron	Air War-Europe
Kincheloe, Charles H.	1944 Nov 21	104th Division, 414th Infantry Regiment	Stolberg
Staples, Holt, Jr.	1944 Dec 16	106th Division, 422nd Infantry Regiment	Bulge
Bozman, V.C. (Slim)	1944 Dec 21	106th Division, 422nd Infantry Regiment	Bulge
Buntin, Robert, Jr.	1945 Jan 17	14th Armored Division, 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion	2nd Bulge
Carlson, John	1945 Jan 17	12th Armored Division, 493rd Field Artillery	2nd Bulge
Conner, Henry	1945 April 1	12th Armored Div., 66th Armored Infantry Battalion	Germany

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Crewe Man Survived 21 Bombing Missions Before Becoming POW



At least four Crewe connected men in Army Air Forces bombers, survived shoot down and captivity. One of these was John Dan (Ducky) Pond who completed 21 missions before his POW event.

Pond was the son of Charles Gibson and Alman Lutton Pond. He was described as a coon hunter and stand-out football player at both Crewe High School and Hampden-Sydney College (Class of 1944). His college studies were interrupted when called to service entering the U.S. Army Air Corps leaving Richmond in April 1942 with Aviation Cadet Class 43-A which trained in California. He became a bombardier in a B-17 Flying Fortress. He went to Knettishall, England with the 560th Bomb Squadron of the 388th Bomb Group, U.S. Eighth Air Force in late 1943. Within three weeks, he in air combat.

The 23-year-old Pond, now a First Lieutenant, flew 21 missions in which his aircraft was shot up by anti-aircraft fire (flak) causing a near-death experience when the plane crash landed on returning to base. On another occasion, on November 13, 1943, his aircraft 'Lil One' developed severe vibrations when one of the propellers would not function. The crew was ordered to bail out before the plane crashed near Ipswich.

On March 8, 1944, his squadron participated in a "daylight precision raid" over Berlin. They flew the number 3 position of the lead element in the low squadron. Their target was the electrical works for the city. German fighter resistance was tremendous. At about 1p.m. as Pond's Flying Fortress reached the vicinity of Oegenbostel (north of Hannover), a German FW-190 fighter "made a head-on pass with guns and cannon blazing" either colliding with or shooting off a piece of the American craft's tail section. From 22,900 feet in the air, the B-17 went into what was described as a "death spin". The pilot ordered the men to bail out. The pressures made it difficult for men to get the escape hatches open, but the plane exploded blasting Pond and others out of the aircraft.

According to a post-war article, "Ducky had heard too many tales of the Germans using American airmen floating down in parachutes for target practice, so he delayed opening his 'chute for a full 20,000 feet...then pulled the rip cord." Pond landed on a small farm and after he got out of his parachute harness, he looked up to observe German fighters shooting at some of his colleagues as they floated down to earth. The crew survivors were the four rear gunners, the others killed in the explosion. There was one of 36 American bombers shot down that day.

Pond was taken prisoner by a German farmer with a shotgun. He recalled later, "The farmer looked as scared as I was but he had a gun and I had broken a couple of bones in my right foot in landing, so I walked ahead of him to a nearby town where he locked me in a jail with some slave laborers." Pond was picked up a few hours later by a German officer and guard detachment who escorted him on foot to a POW camp. Passing through villages, Pond was the target of scorn by German civilians, but the German soldiers protected him. Pond recalled, "The German officer talked very nice to me when we were marching along the road but when we went through the towns, he would rough me up a bit to please the civilians."

Pond was reported to his family as having been killed in action. It was five months before they learned he had been captured. He was taken to the infamous Dulag-Luft, a specialized German interrogation center and then moved to the American compound at Stalag Luft III for processing and movement to Stalag Luft I in Barth. Pond spent the next 14 months as a prisoner of war dropping from 200 to 150 pounds in weight. The Germans fed prisoners of war horse meat, frozen potatoes, turnips, and brown bread. The German rations were supplemented by Red Cross food parcels when they could get them.

Pond's hair grew very long while a prisoner. He recalled humorously, "With my long hair, I really looked like that character, Zeke, in the sparkplug cartoon in the Saturday Evening Post." Pond said he could not find a camp barber "so when it grew down around his shoulders, he borrowed an old razor from a fellow in camp and with the aid of the razor owner, he shaved off all his hair. When the German camp commandant saw him minus his hair, he ordered another rogue's gallery shot made." The new photo showed him "bald headed as a cue ball."

The camp was liberated on May 1, 1945, by a Russian armored column. After returning home, Pond returned to Hampden-Sydney College where he finished his studies later earning a master's at Madison College. He became an educator and administrator in the Warren County School System in Front Royal, Virginia. He died February 17, 2011, at the age of 90. During the war he was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, the Purple Heart for wounds received in combat and the European Campaign Medal with one battle star.

Department Commander Butch Schupska making his rounds through Virginia



Pictured above: Department Commander Butch Schupska at a fundraising event for fallen Navy Seals

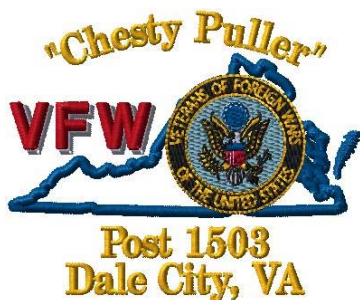
Department Commander attends a Hail and Farewell for outgoing Service Officer Tammie Brown, and Incoming Service Officer Raymond Bailey at Post 1503 in Dale City.

Pictured from left to right is: State Adjutant Quartermaster Ed Mann, Post 3160 Assistant Service Officer Johnny Bird, Post 1503 Assistant Service Officer Tammie Brown, State Service Officer Bobbiejo Lazo, Incoming Post 1503 Service Officer Raymond Bailey and Department Commander Butch Schupska.



Dale City, Post 1503 remembers one of their own comrades during a 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony

Post Commander Tom Levitt speaks to a group of Comrades, Auxiliary and guests during a Remembrance Ceremony conducted at the Post on September 11th. Post 1503 lost a member at the Pentagon on 9/11.



Pictured on the left is US Navy SK3 Jamie Fallon, a member of Post 1503 killed in the Pentagon attack on 9/11.

Pictured below from left to right, US Army SGM (ret) Mike Cano, Army Bugler, played TAPS during the 9/11 Memorial Service. Below, Post 1503's award winning Honor Guard presents the Colors during the ceremony.



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

By Jeanne Tomlinson , Auxiliary 7589

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery is a historic monument dedicated to deceased U.S. service members whose remains have not been identified. The centennial ceremony was held November 11, 2021. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has been guarded by fewer than 700 Sentinels since the 3rd U.S. Infantry began counting in 1958. The Old Guard was and remains, a combat unit and women were not permitted to serve in that capacity until recent years. In 1994, women could volunteer to serve as tomb guards after the 289th Military Police Company was attached to the Old Guard. The MP branch is a combat-support unit that included women.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier contains the remains of an unidentified soldier from:

World War I – placed November 11, 1921
 World War II – placed May 30, 1958
 Korean War – placed May 30, 1958
 Vietnam War – placed May 28, 1984

In May 1998 the remains of the Vietnam War veteran were identified through DNA testing and they were exhumed on June 30, 1998 and given to the family. This part of the tomb remains vacant to this day.

In 1996, Sergeant Heather Johnson became the first woman to earn the Tomb Guard Identification Badge. She volunteered for duty in June 1995 and earned her badge in 1996. Since then, four other female Sentinels have been awarded the Tomb Guard Identification Badge:

Sergeant Danyell Wilson, 1997
 Staff Sergeant Tonya Bell, 1998
 Sergeant Ruth Hanks, 1998
 Sergeant 1st Class Chelsea Porterfield 2021

The first two weeks, all “newmen” are given basic instructions on uniform prep, the walk sequence, and behavioral assessments. After this initial training, they are tested to see if they will continue. From here, the training is self-paced. The average training is 7-8 months, though the fastest has been 4 months.

“Newmen” are given 12-hour duty days plus homework. They do not watch TV, acknowledge jokes told in the quarters, talk to the public or talk to other guards unless spoken to (unless they have questions regarding training). Newmen generally train on performance at night when the cemetery is closed to the public. They live at regular barracks at Ft. Myer next to Arlington Cemetery.

As one goes through the training, they are tested on three things on four separate occasions: uniform, knowledge, performance.

Uniform. A “Newman” may only have 2 minor infractions and no major infractions. A minor infraction is if any one item on their uniform is more than 1/64” out of place.

Knowledge. “Newmen” are required to memorize a 17-page packet of information on the cemetery and write it out, including

punctuation. In order to pass, there may be no more than 10 mistakes. Some of what they have to memorize are poems that reflect the solemnity and honor of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers.

Performance. With over 200 points of inspection, there may be no major infractions and only 2 minor ones, from foot placement on the mat to cadence. They aim for 72 beats per minute.

There is a 10% completion rate of passing the fourth and final test on these three components. Guards who fail a test may take it a second time. If they fail again, they are released from training, but may come back later and start from the beginning. If the 4th test is passed, the “newman” will become Fully Qualified and earn the Tomb Guard Identification Badge, the second rarest badge in the U.S. Army. The sterling silver badge is worn on the right breast pocket of the uniform. At any point, no matter how experienced a Sentinel is, if the weapon touches the plaza outside the weapon inspection, the Sentinel is released from being a tomb guard.

Once the badge is earned, it is kept for life, unless the guard does something to dishonor the tomb or the Army. It is the only badge in the Army that can be revoked for standards not related to regulations, but rather personal conduct. If a Sentinel is convicted of a felony, a DUI or any other major crime, the badge is revoked and the name is stricken from the record

All guards are issued one uniform and are responsible for maintaining it. It is a standard uniform, however, this one is made of wool instead of standard-issue polyester. Most guards end up owning three sets: one regular day uniform, one for rain and one they are working on. It takes between 12 and 6 hours to prepare the uniform. In some cases due to weather elements and fading, a uniform may need to be replaced after only 9 days. The unknown soldiers have all been awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest medal one can receive. Tomb guards can wear any medals they have earned but cannot wear rank on their uniform, as they cannot outrank the unknown soldiers, since their ranks are unknown

The tomb is guarded 24 hours a day 7 days a week regardless of the weather or other events. Sentinels usually perform this duty for 1-1.5 years. It is not meant to be a lifetime appointment but rather an honor to serve. After 9 months served the award becomes a permanent badge which may be worn for the rest of the guard’s military career. Soldiers in training may guard the tomb and perform duties just as a Sentinel, but only a Sentinel may wear the badge.

The guards are changed every 30 minutes April 1 to September 30 and every hour between October 1 and March 31. The guards change every two hours during the hours the cemetery is closed to the public. Guards take 21 steps on the mat, turn facing the tomb for 21 seconds, turn on the mat, change their weapon to their outside shoulder, wait 21 seconds and start again.

As of August 21, 2021 there have been 688 badges awarded.

For the first time in the 84 year vigil of the tomb, an all-female guard change occurred on October 21, 2021.