

12-23-2015

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Repository Citation

Dobbins , J., & Davis , W. (2015). *Presidential Ceremonial Guards Members Serve Prestigious, Somber Occasions.* .

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Presidential Ceremonial Guards Members Serve Prestigious, Somber Occasions

by Jeremy Dobbins

There's a small group of statuesque men and women we always see at this country's most prestigious military ceremonies. In the Navy, they're called the Presidential Ceremonial Guard. This elite team is carefully chosen for their appearance and fortitude. Today our Veterans Voices series continues with Marine Corp veteran and Wright State student, Jeremy Dobbins of Springfield, who spoke with one of these men - Navy veteran and Wright State Lake Campus student, Corey Yoder.

Transcript:

Jeremy Dobbins (JD): So you said you're in the Navy?

Corey Yoder (CY): Yep, five years active duty. Basically, my job was to load ammunition onto aircrafts - ammunition meaning missiles, torpedoes, anything that went boom.

JD: When did you end up getting selected to... it's not the Honor Guard...

CY: No, it's the Presidential Ceremonial Guard. You get selected for that while you're in boot camp. You go into a pool of one thousand to two thousand people, however many people are in boot camp that get selected for this. You have to be six foot tall if you're male, or taller, and five nine or taller if you're a female. So they take all those people and send them to this room, then they narrow it down to twenty people out of all those people, and I was selected for that.

JD: Was there any training to prepare you mentally for being in that environment? Or did they tell you how to check yourself?

CY: No, not really. We had tightness training, and tightness training is what it is, you remain tight. If they saw you starting to flinch then everybody was going to get punished while you were in training. If you scratched your nose, if you blinked for too long, if they took a Nerf ball and threw it by your head and you flinched, then everybody was going to get punished for that. So they had their ways of doing tightness training and some of those might seem like hazing to some people, but to us, we needed it because you have to remain like a statue on a set. Otherwise, the family is going to get a poor image, and we didn't want that.

JD: Did you do a lot of funeral services?

CY: Yeah, I have over thirteen hundred military funerals under my belt. You get kind of numb to it after awhile. My first Christmas in the military was spent getting thirteen caskets off of an aircraft at Dover Delaware Air Force Base. That was pretty intense. That was my first taste of what it was like.

JD: Yeah, like you said, after thirteen hundred they start to blur in your mind. Are there any in particular that stand out to you as memorable?

CY: I remember the first casket I ever carried. It was really cold outside. I can't remember the name of the person we buried that day, but I remember that it was really cold outside. There were a few ceremonies that I did where the President was so close that I could have reached out and touched his coat, but then Secret Service might have shot me. That, and I probably would have gotten my ass chewed when I got back to base.

JD: Yeah, I imagine there's some general order for you guys not to touch the President.

CY: We have to maintain tightness at all times. It was really cool. Especially when I did Queen Elizabeth's arrival ceremony at the White House. That was on the White House lawn, right out in front, and we're all out there and Queen Elizabeth and the President walk by and it's like, "Whoa." I remember getting slapped on a set. We call funerals sets. It's sad to say it like that, but you're acting.

JD: Yeah, you're on stage.

CY: I remember we were on a set and I was folding the flag and I got slapped in the face by a widow because she was distraught, heartbroken, and I was doing the casket bearer's speech as I was handing her the flag, and I got a stiff hook across the face. I was able to keep my composure, finish the bearer's speech, hand her the flag, salute her, and walk away.

JD: Yeah.

CY: It's changed me, I think for the better. It's made me a stronger individual. It's not that you don't have emotions; it's just that you control them to the point where you're helping other people control theirs.

Veterans Voices is produced in collaboration with the [Veteran and Military Center at Wright State University](#). Funding for this series comes from Ohio Humanities.

Photo:

caption: Corey Yoder and Jeremy Dobbins

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