

Broadening Leaders, Sharpening Minds, and Developing Differing Perspectives

MAJ Tim Meadors

“I encourage our leaders to seek broadening assignments in the National Capital Region. It is important as we build the Army of the future that we have sharp minds and differing perspectives at the helm.” — **GEN John F. Campbell** (In his last email as the Army’s Vice Chief of Staff, 14 August 2014)

The security environment around the globe presents a number of challenging and complex problems that require leaders at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels to think critically and implement creative solutions. Choices are often made by decision makers with an incomplete understanding of the environment, but they must be made nonetheless. As GEN Campbell conveyed in his email, the Army needs broadened leaders with “sharp minds and differing perspectives” to navigate through these challenging situations. The National Capital Region (NCR) provides the landscape for a number of opportunities to build these characteristics. The 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) provides one of the premier broadening opportunities to sharpen minds and develop differing perspectives for adaptable and agile Army leaders.

I am fortunate to have led a platoon in the 4th Infantry Division during a 2003-2004 deployment to Iraq, worked as an assistant S3 with the 101st Airborne Division during a 2005-2006 Iraq deployment, commanded a company with the 101st during a 2007-2008 Iraq deployment, and served as a battalion S3 in Afghanistan with the 1st Infantry Division in 2013. The first three deployments set the conditions for a successful broadening experience as an Army Congressional Fellow from May 2009 to May 2013. The fellowship expanded my perspective as I transitioned from a company grade to a field grade officer. Both my time in combat and my broadening experience on Capitol Hill equipped me for the challenges I now face as The Old Guard’s Regimental S3. The Old Guard, my operational experience, and my time on Capitol Hill provided a unique opportunity for me to sharpen my mind and broaden my perspective.



Infantry Soldiers from the 4th Battalion, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment perform a colonial charge while re-enacting a scene from America’s history. The unit is modeled after General George Washington’s personal guard during his tenure as the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. (Photo by Alison K. Connors)

The Old Guard has long been regarded for the professionalism and precision it displays at the highest level. Whether executing a state funeral to honor the life of a deceased president, sharing the Army's story with thousands of people during a patriotic performance, conducting funerals in Arlington National Cemetery, or preparing to reinforce security in the NCR as a contingency force, Soldiers in The Old Guard operate in a strategic environment. The missions require Soldiers who can flawlessly execute a live performance in front of thousands one day, conduct squad live fires to standard the next, and honor a fallen comrade during a funeral the following day. Each operation is executed while also being fully prepared to initiate an n-hour sequence in response to being activated for a state funeral. Each mission offers no room for error.

Strategic Significance. The Army's arsenal includes several organizations with unique capabilities that produce phenomenal effects when employed. These effects are often decisive contributions that provide a distinct advantage. The Old Guard is the primary organization the Army and the Department of Defense employs to demonstrate the military's character, competence, and commitment to strategic audiences that include the American people, senior leaders in the U.S. government, and foreign dignitaries. Soldiers in the unit convey messages that inspire and represent the Army's values and history.

The Old Guard's range of missions places the unit in positions to become the populace's permanent view of the Army. Every four years Soldiers in The Old Guard participate in the Presidential Inauguration. Twice a year millions around the world watch Soldiers from The Old Guard honor our fallen and veterans during Presidential ceremonies on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. Annually, another nearly five million tourists from around the world join with Soldiers from The Old Guard during the 24-hour vigil at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Spirit of America tour, where more than 40,000 Americans watch a live performance during a three-city tour, is yet another venue where America and America's Army unite in honor of our great nation. These events combine with daily funerals in Arlington National Cemetery. Regardless of the time or place, when The Old Guard is employed, the strategic effect is a lasting impression of the prestige, professionalism, and values of today's Army.

Broadening Opportunity. The increased emphasis on broadening leaders and the number of opportunities now available show the Army's deliberate path to grow leaders able to solve complex problems. GEN Campbell alluded to the importance of differing perspectives when engaging difficult problem sets. The diversity of the Army's contemporary operations proves the need for problem solvers that think critically, implement creative solutions, and incorporate perspectives developed during broadening experiences.

Leaders in The Old Guard are groomed to succeed in these fluid, high stress, and no-fail situations. They display a high degree of agility and adaptability when operating at the strategic level. Prospectively, the regimental commanding officer (RCO), COL Johnny Davis, provided a vision for leaders in the organization that builds on their proven record as warfighters. His vision describes the need for "leaders that are agile under pressure, adaptable to new environments, relevant to the Army's mission, and intelligent warriors that provide the predictability, training, and vision needed to excel in the joint, inter-agency, inter-governmental, and multi-national environment."

Success is the only option for The Old Guard. The RCO's vision also outlines that Soldiers assigned to the formation are expected to be "physically fit, morally straight, and operationally adaptable." To succeed in The Old Guard, the individual must possess the intestinal fortitude, resilience, and strength the Army expects of physically fit Soldiers; exude the Army values and possess high levels of both character and competence as a morally straight Soldier; and demonstrate the agility needed to operate in different settings while also adapting to new environs.

Not everyone can successfully operate in unfamiliar zones. Those who feel they can navigate in a strategic environment while representing the Army should consider The Old Guard as an option for a future assignment. Although an Infantry regiment, positions are available for most military occupational specialties and a variety of ranks.

Leaders with Soldiers in their formations who have sharp minds, need a differing perspective, and would benefit from a broadened outlook should encourage their subordinates to pursue a position in The Old Guard. Those looking for a challenging assignment in a strategic environment should apply for a position in The Old Guard. The Army needs the best and brightest to represent the values, lineage, and decisive force we provide to the United States. The Army needs those same leaders to employ differing perspectives in a complex and increasingly unstable world. Anyone interested in pursuing GEN Campbell's charge and experiencing something new should file an application at <http://www.oldguard.mdw.army.mil/join-us>.

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