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U.S. Army Tomb Guard shares history of Arlington National Cemetery at Camp Dodge



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American history enthusiasts braved the unseasonable spring blizzard on Tuesday, April 3, venturing out to the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum at Camp Dodge, Johnston, to attend a presentation by Iowa native and former tomb guard at Arlington National Cemetery, Tom Tudor.



Tudor's history at Arlington began after receiving his draft notice in May of 1968. Short of hours at University of Iowa, Tudor entered into the Army and, having visited Arlington once before, was immediately drawn to the idea of being one of the honored few to guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Practicing the marches in his spare time, Tudor made the cut. Out of his 18 months at Fort Myer, 15 and a half of those months were spent as a tomb guard.

After leaving the Army in 1970, Tudor worked construction for several years before going back to school on the G.I. bill. He moved to Colorado in 1981 and started speaking about the history of Arlington in 1987.

"Tom is, today, a walking talking history book about Arlington National Cemetery," said Bob Holliday, president of the Gold Star Museum's board of directors.

Since then, Tudor's interest in history has only grown. His desire to



Gold Star Museum board of directors president Bob Holliday (left) and Brigadier General Randy Greenwood (right) welcomed tomb guard Tom Tudor back to Iowa for a presentation about the history behind Arlington National Cemetery.

educate others about history has been facilitated by the Society of the Honor Guard, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a non-profit educational support group that Tudor served as president of from 2015 to 2016.

These days he gives his presentation about 80 times a year across the country.

"The older I get, the more interested I become in history because I'm becoming a part of it," said Tudor.

Tudor walked the audience through the history of the cemetery, starting from its acquisition in 1802 by George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of Martha Washington. Custis inherited the plantation from his father and built Arlington House, where he lived until his death in 1857, at which point the property was passed on to his daughter, Mary Anna Custis Lee, who at that point was the wife of Robert E. Lee.

When Virginia seceded from the United States and Lee joined the Con-

federacy, the area around Alexandria, including the Arlington grounds, were occupied by Union forces. As casualties from the Civil War increased, area cemeteries reached their capacity, mandating the need for a new location to bury dead soldiers that couldn't be sent back home. Arlington was chosen, and the property was seized by the government after refusing to accept Mary Anna Custis Lee's tax payment.

After the war, Lee's eldest son, George Washington Custis Lee, successfully sued the federal government for the property, only to turn around and sell it back to the government for its market value. The cemetery has been government property ever since.

Following the chaos of World War I, which left many soldiers missing or unidentified, the cemetery built the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as a memorial to their sacrifice. Since then, three additional tombs honoring unknown soldiers

from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War have been added to the monument.

While the security of Arlington as a whole is managed by civilian guards, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has been protected by the Army since 1926.

Tomb guards may not have the most dangerous job in the military, with their biggest threats consisting of cold weather and the occasional critter invading their personal space, but it is a job that requires an exceptional amount of discipline.

While tomb guards are on duty, their job requires a meticulous level of detail that dictates every step, turn, and pause. Uniforms, posture, and even facial expressions are regulated to the smallest detail. Tudor says that any divergence was a fast way to be removed from the guard.

"Perfection was expected," said Tudor.

Everything about the Tomb of the Unknowns is heavily ceremonial. From the conduct of the guards to the selection and treatment of the remains, extraordinary efforts are made to protect and honor the unknown soldiers buried there and all they represent.

"The unknowns gave not only their lives, but their identity," said Tudor. "To strive for anything less than perfection to guard their tomb would dishonor them."

Capping off the presentation, Tudor gave the audience a first look at a new project he's working on. "Iowans in Arlington" recounts the history of Iowa natives buried or honored in the national cemetery. Tudor hopes to have more stories to tell of the Iowans in Arlington when he returns next year.



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