



A Nation That Honors the Fallen - the Flags In Mission for the Old Guard

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Yesterday, at the break of dawn, the soldiers of the **3rd United States Infantry Regiment**, universally known as "**The Old Guard**", marched into the only two national cemeteries managed by the Army. On their backs, rucksacks loaded with small American flags.

Their mission: **to honor America's fallen infantrymen and heroes by placing a flag in front of every single headstone** and columbarium column. A tribute that counts about **250,000 flags** at Arlington National Cemetery (Virginia) and **13,500** at the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery (Washington).

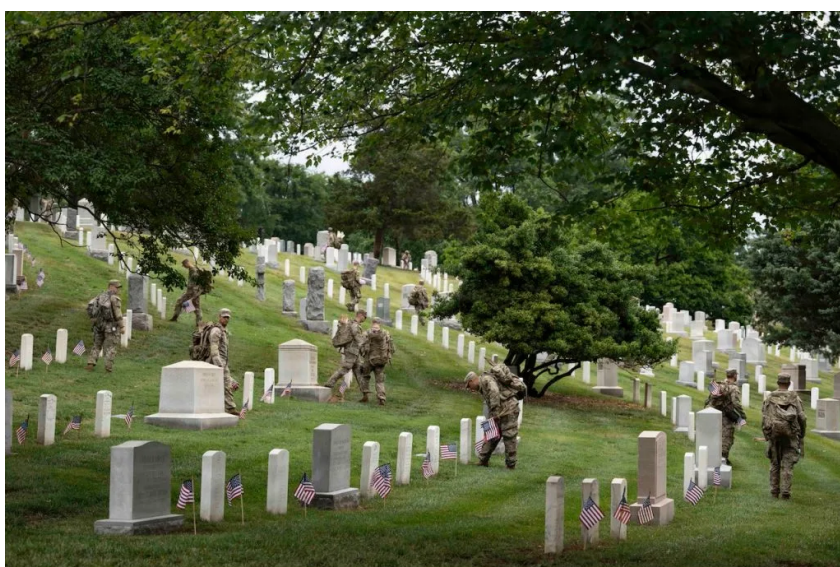
This tradition, known as "**Flags In**", takes place every year in both cemeteries on the Thursday before Memorial Day.

Precision to the Millimeter

As the soldiers deployed across the 639 acres of Arlington Cemetery, the ritual repeated identically and rigorously: a tap with the boot against the headstone and the insertion of the flag into the ground exactly at heel height. This method ensures a uniform and impeccable distance for each individual flag.

"Doing it right is essential" explains Army Master Sgt. Jeb Hague, as he turns to slightly straighten a flag.

Hague, serving in the Old Guard's *Fife and Drum Corps* since 2006, has planted flags in nearly every section of the cemetery. *"Every time I do it, I learn something more each year"*, he added, emphasizing how different areas hold deep and varied meanings.



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A 250-Year-Old Bond

The Old Guard has carried on the "Flags In" tradition since **1948**, the year it was designated as the Army's official ceremonial unit. Every available soldier of the regiment takes part in the event.

At Arlington, where members of the armed forces rest from the War of Independence to today's conflicts, "Flags In" ideally unites today's soldiers with generations of service and sacrifice, embracing **250 years of American history**.

For many of them, however, it is not just an institutional duty, but a **deeply personal mission**.

The Names Behind the Headstones

Sergeant Hague is one of the many military personnel who have friends and family at Arlington:

- **Alvin J. Buchanan Jr.** (Section 66): His great-uncle, who served in the Navy during World War II and the Korean War.
- **Staff Sgt. Adam Dickmyer** (Section 60): His friend and colleague from the Old Guard, guardian of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, killed in Afghanistan in 2010.

"Memorial Day is a special and solemn time", Hague recounts. "But for me, 'Flags In' is much more intimate. In the silence of the early morning, before the cemetery opens to the public, we soldiers can reflect on those who lost their lives defending the nation. I always take a few seconds to read the name on the headstone and remember them".



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A Universal Tribute

Throughout the day, the tribute extended to other symbolic places:

- **The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier:** The tomb's guards (also members of the 3rd Regiment) placed flags to honor the three unknown soldiers buried there and all American military personnel missing or never identified.
- **Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery:** Here, veterans residing in the *Armed Forces Retirement Home* joined the uniformed soldiers to plant the flags.

In the afternoon, a sea of American flags was already waving over both historic landscapes.

During the Memorial Day weekend, visitors and families will see the result of this extraordinary mission: one of the many ways the United States Armed Forces ensure that their fallen are never forgotten. For the Old Guard, it is, in Hague's words, "*an opportunity to give something back*", commemorating anyone who has served and sacrificed for the country.

News link: <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4499458/for-old-guard-soldiers-flags-in-is-a-personal-mission/>