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The Queen's Guard: spit-polish and precision

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CLICK, CLICK. Slap, slap.
Thud . . . thud.
Click, click. Slap, slap.
Thud . . . thud."

In steady rhythm, the sounds go on. The click of bayonets. The slap of leather gloves against rifle butts. The thud of heavy, spit-polished shoes on the parade ground.

The routine performed by the Queen's Guard is called silent drill because there are no verbal commands. But in order to understand it, you have to listen to the sounds.

In March the 21-member Queen's Guard Trick Drill Team represented Rutgers at the Melbourne Military Tattoo, a colorful and musical display of bagpipes, marching bands, Chinese acrobats, Maori singers, Highland dancers — even the Greek Presidential Guard. Each night for ten nights, after a noisy performance by the acrobats of the Singapore Armed Forces, a hush fell over the crowd as the lights dimmed and the Queen's Guard marched onto the field of the world's largest cricket stadium. A single verbal command from Team Commander Thomas Berardinelli R'80, then nothing — only the sounds of silent drill, punctuated by gasps from the crowd at each hair-raising maneuver.

The drill routine is composed of a series of formations: wedges, parallelograms, circles and, appropriately enough for a Rutgers team, a sunburst. The Queen's Guard, of course, doesn't just march through these complicated formations. As a trick drill team, they are constantly pointing, twirling and throwing their rifles. The weapons are 1903 A3 Springfield rifles fixed with 16-inch bayonets. The combined weight of rifle and bayonet is approximately 12 pounds, and the bayonets are sharp.

The crowds gasp at the overhead rifle tosses, but they are stunned into silence by a maneuver towards the end of the routine. The Guard forms three parallel lines. While the two outside lines spin their rifles like overlapping airplane propellers, the center line moves between them. This section is called "suicide."

The audience's perspective makes "suicide" look more dangerous than it is. On special occasions, the Queen's Guard has even allowed outsiders to walk the routine. Talk-show host Don Lane (the "Australian Johnny Carson") was invited to do the suicide drill when the team appeared on Australian television during their trip to Melbourne. He did it, with great comic effect, but only after Berardinelli asked if there was someone else who could finish the show.

David Amthauer Eng.'70 wrote the current routine after a 1968 appearance in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, adapting steps used by some of the pipe bands he saw there. The performance lasts eight minutes and includes 1368 separate movements for each driller. No two individuals in the Guard have routines that are exactly alike. When something goes wrong, it is not always easy to figure out why.

After each performance in Melbourne, the team members subjected themselves to a rigorous self-evaluation. They were assisted in this critique by four alumni of the Guard who traveled with them as alternates, in case of illness or injury. It was difficult to understand how these alumni, watching at a distance from the stands, could see the minor errors that the crowd never noticed. Michael Kabo R'74, who led a Queen's Guard team to an international exhibition in Canada and was an alternate in Australia, explained: "You can hear them."

In silent drill, every sound is critical. Timing and placement are everything. When they are off, even slightly, twirling rifles and bayonets strike shoulders and graze skulls. Even in the 120,000-seat Melbourne Cricket Grounds, site of the 1956 Olympic Games, the alumni of the Queen's Guard could hear the occasional mistake.

When the team is relaxed and feeling good, they will show you their scars.

The Queen's Guard was named, of course, for Queen's College, but the team's own origins go back only to 1957 when it was established by the Rutgers Air Force R.O.T.C. Four years later the Guard represented New Jersey in President Kennedy's inaugural parade. In the spring of that year, they won for the first time the National Cherry Blossom Championship in Washington. They won



Festival in Toronto. Their first trip to Australia came in 1976 when they appeared in the first Australian military tattoo in Hobart, Tasmania. And in 1977, the team performed in the NATO Musik Festival in Kaiserslautern, West Germany.

Nineteen-eighty has been a special year for the Queen's Guard, with appearances both in Melbourne and in Edinburgh. (They are the only overseas contingent to have appeared three times at the Edinburgh Tattoo.) And they were invited this year to participate in 1981 or 1982 in the Royal Tournament in London (the granddaddy of all military festivals), which celebrated its 100th anniversary last July.

The "tattoo" was originally a signal given by drum or bugle which called soldiers to return to their quarters for the night. Innkeepers turned off their taps — "tap-to" — and soldiers had half an hour to find their way home. Eventually, the custom developed into a ceremonial performance of military music at the end of the day. After the First World War, the ceremony of Tattoo was expanded to include military drill and other displays.

that coveted title again in 1965 and 1973. Although the Cherry Blossom Nationals were discontinued after 1973, the Queen's Guard has been undefeated in intercollegiate trick drill competition since then and is considered to be the defending national champion.

In 1965 the team represented New Jersey again in President Johnson's inaugural parade, and three years later made its first appearance overseas in the prestigious Edinburgh Tattoo. In ten short years the Queen's Guard had achieved national and international distinction.

But history and student sentiment were running against R.O.T.C. By 1970 declining enrollment forced a merger between the Air Force R.O.T.C. Queen's Guard and their older campus rivals, the Army R.O.T.C. Scarlet Rifles.

Despite the prevalence of anti-military feelings on campus, the new organization prospered, retiring the national championship and returning to Edinburgh in 1973. The following year, the Queen's Guard performed in the Canadian National Exposition Scottish World

In 1949 the Edinburgh Military Tattoo was established and has since grown into one of Europe's most popular tourist attractions. This August the Tattoo presented 28 performances to an audience totaling more than 250,000 people from around the world. In addition to the Queen's Guard, the 1980 Tattoo included the Long Beach State University Marching Band from California, the Band and Dancers of the Royal Guard of the Sultan of Oman, the Wellington, New Zealand, Pipe Band, the City of Vancouver Police Pipe Band, and an assortment of King's Own Scottish Borders, Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, and Gordon Highlanders. The Rutgers drill team, led by Verne James L'81, who became team commander in May, was clearly a favorite with the crowds.

The popularity of the Queen's Guard overseas stands in stark contrast to their recognition at home. Almost half a million spectators have seen them this year in Melbourne and Edinburgh. In addition to the appearance on Australia's most popular television show, the team's performance at Edinburgh will be shown world-wide to an audience of 35 million on BBC television.



In Melbourne, the team was feted by the Lord Mayor of the city and his guest, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh. They were also entertained by the Premier of Victoria, Australia's "Garden State." The Guard carried greetings from Garden State Governor Brendan Byrne and New Brunswick Mayor John Lynch.

The disparity in popularity at home and overseas is explained in large part by the fact that the British tradition of military displays has never taken hold in the United States. Perhaps the people of island nations like Great Britain and Australia, who have been threatened with invasion, are more conscious of their dependence on military defense. Perhaps the social cachet of military service in the Commonwealth countries has made such festivals more fashionable. Maybe they have better band music (although the military bands in Australia play a great deal of Sousa). Whatever the reason, there are few events in the United States that offer the Queen's Guard the performing opportunities they have abroad.

Sometimes the Guardsmen complain about their lack of recognition at home. Occasionally they wonder about the fact that their total audience in 1980 will be

as big as the crowds that see the Scarlet Knight football and basketball teams each season. But most of the time the Queen's Guard keep such thoughts to themselves. They are an intensely private group, bound together by a shared experience that few outsiders understand.

Freshman recruits undergo two months of rigorous training in the fall, followed during the semester break by a ten-day practice in which the full 21-man team works out 12 hours a day. During the first semester, performances are given by a nine-man squad of upperclassmen, but the full team is not ready for competition until the end of January.

After the new recruits are fully trained, the Queen's Guard continues to devote many hours a week to practice. Even on tour, they spend a minimum of two hours each day rehearsing their eight-minute routine. A less-than-perfect performance results in a double practice the next day.

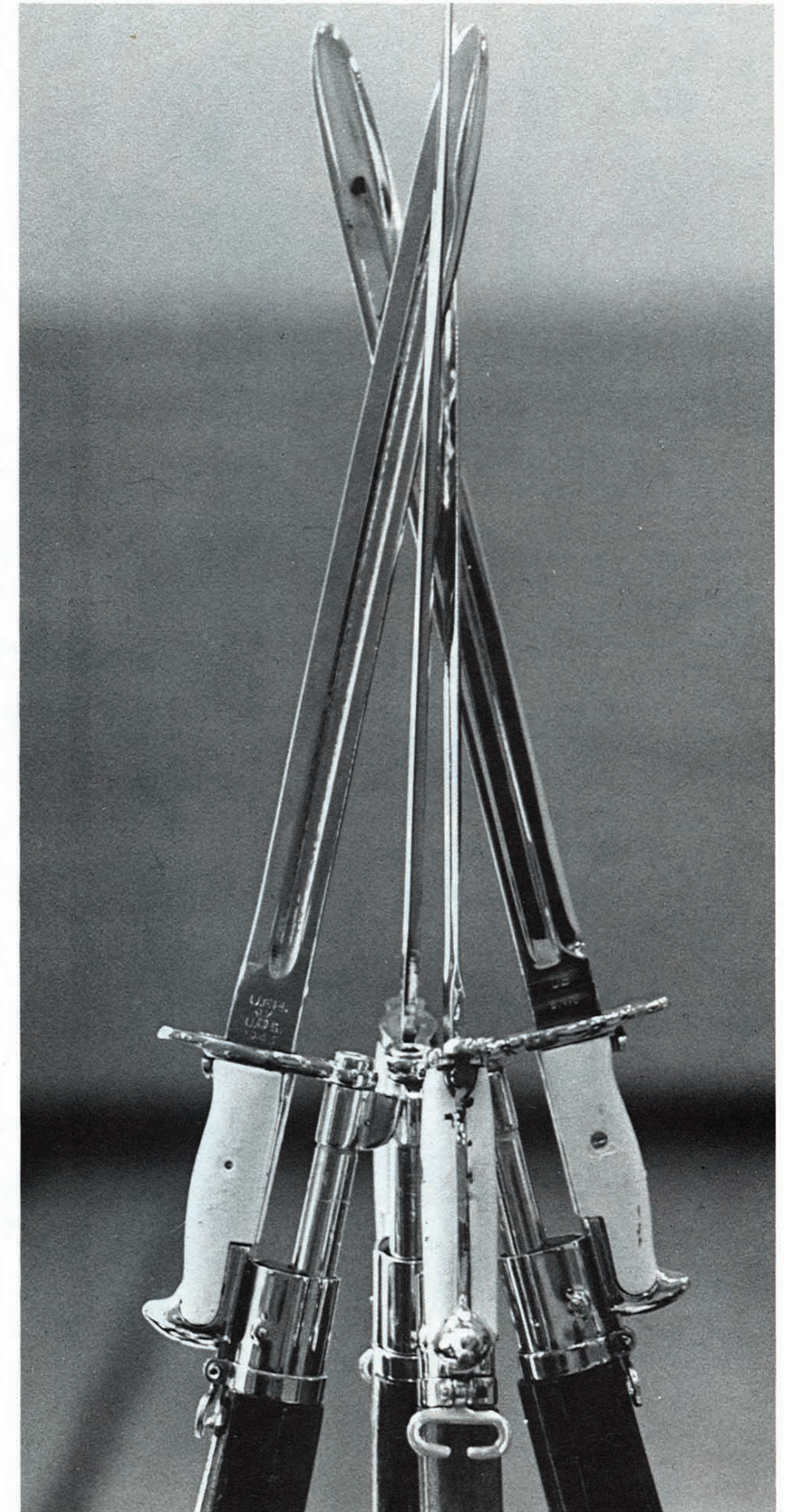
But there is little grumbling about the discipline of the drill. The Queen's Guard knows only too well the price of error.

Something more than fear, however, drives their quest for perfection. They are proud to be from Rutgers, proud to represent New Jersey and the United States, proud to be members of the Queen's Guard. And they are grateful for the remarkable opportunities for foreign travel which their hard work makes possible.

A group of otherwise typical college students, the Queen's Guard is set apart by the unique combination of experiences they share: the rigor of training, the complexity and precision of the drill, the high price of error, dominance in competition at home and celebrity in exhibition abroad.

The silent drill of the Queen's Guard is a difficult and sometimes lonely activity. But when the bayonets flash in the glare of spotlights and the crowd applauds, it is worth it. Counting and listening, the Queen's Guard is quietly on the march. □

Mr. Edwards accompanied the Queen's Guard to Australia as a guest of the Melbourne Military Tattoo and attended the Edinburgh Tattoo while on vacation.





Courtesy of the Queen's Guard



Left: With Executive Commander Verne James L'81 at the hub, the Queen's Guard form a sunburst on the esplanade in front of Edinburgh Castle, where they performed each night during the Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Above: Led by Executive Commander Thomas Bertinelli R'80, the Queen's Guard appeared on the Don Lane Show, the most popular television program in Australia, while performing at the Melbourne Military Tattoo.

