

# Drill Team Puts Rutgers on the Map

By ALBERT J. PARISI

**I**N A steamy bubble-domed enclosure on the Busch campus of Rutgers University here, 17 students marched to a rhythm without music, their cadence marked by the click of rifle butts against concrete, the slap of gloved hands against rifle stocks and the whoosh of twirling weapons.

They are members of the Queens Guard Drill Team, a 30-year-old institution that represents Rutgers, the state and, indeed, the nation in competition in the United States and abroad. (The team represented New Jersey at the Inaugural parades of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.)

The team, named for the university's original title, Queens College, has won numerous awards, but most of its trophies are kept in boxes because there is little room in its offices to display them.

"You might say that practice makes perfect, especially in what we do here," said 21-year-old Eric Braganca of Randolph, a fourth-year engineering student and commander of the team.

"But there's more to it than putting on a show, because you're dealing with varied personalities. As a team, we grow, and where there is growth we shine for everyone to see."

Its grueling practice sessions result in drills that are dazzling examples of flash and showmanship.

Since 1968, the team has performed widely in the United States, Canada and overseas, including Britain, Australia, West Germany and France. Many of its routines have been shown on British Broadcasting Corporation news documentaries, particularly its performances at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, regarded as the Olympics of stylized drill.

Tomorrow, the team leaves for Auckland, New Zealand, to take part with the Royal New Zealand Artillery and Navy Bands in that country's Easter Pageant. The team is seeking donations to finance its invitational trip to the 1988 World Exposition in Brisbane, Australia, where it will perform at the July 4 celebrations at the United States Pavilion.

Members dress in crisp military-style uniforms and use World War I-era Springfield rifles with 16-inch, chrome-plated bayonets (other drill units use plastic rifles and eight-inch bayonets). The team is a voluntary campus activity and uniforms are bought with donated funds.

"The weapon is not only rare, but it's perfectly balanced, making it easy to handle," said Joseph Carlani, 25, of Burlington, an alumni adviser to the Queens Guard.

The weapon and a number of styl-

ized drill routines developed by team members in the 1970's are the trademarks by which the Queens Guard is best known.

Those students accepted for the team say there is more to the lure than pomp.

"It teaches you a certain kind of discipline, and, once you've mastered the routines, you develop a sense of accomplishment that is unmatched by any other school activity here," said Mr. Braganca, who is in the Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps program and plans a military career.

"It also teaches you planning and team play because it is everyone's talents here that make the Guard a winning outfit. We have to rely on one another, strengths and weaknesses included."

The team has an average yearly budget of \$21,000, which is provided by student activity fees as well as corporate and alumni donations. Its traveling expenses are usually paid for by host countries and competition organizations.

More often than not, fund-raisers help to pick up unforeseen expenses.

"A couple of years ago in Washington, one of the fellows was injured in practice before a performance, but it didn't stop him, not at all," said Ellen

Harris, an R.O.T.C. administrative clerk.

The student's heel was gashed, she said, when a bayonet-topped rifle slipped and fell.

"He marched anyway," Ms. Harris said, "bit his lip and carried on so as not to let the team down. Maybe my opinion's a little prejudiced, but that kind of determination and pride in yourself and the team goes beyond special."

Team members and advisers say that, while some routines are a complex mix of skill and dexterity, one in particular — called "Suicide" — has been known to be hair-raising for audiences.

Part of the Guard's 15-minute performance, it is fashioned by two facing lines of rifle-wielding guardsmen while two additional lines march through the gantlet-like tunnel in opposite directions. Airborne rifles with their bayonets fixed flash within inches of the marching guardsmen.

"It's a heck of a sight with absolutely no margin for error," Mr. Braganca said.

"You learn respect and, of course, discipline," said Mr. Carlani, now a Barclays Bank officer in Manhattan. "And most important, you learn to work with other people and rely on them, and that's something that you will carry with you always." ■