

Show-stealing former cadets set for Tattoo return 40 years on

Published Date: 04 July 2008

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THEY received a heroes' welcome on the streets of the Capital four decades ago, while their breathtaking bayonet and rifle displays were the highlight of the Tattoo.

Now, a little older and perhaps wider around the waist, a group of former US cadet officers have been invited back for the 40th anniversary of their first performance.

The Queens Guard of Rutgers University, New Jersey, will be guests of honour at Edinburgh Castle, where they first dazzled audiences in 1968.

The returning members are hoping for a similar reaction to their first visit.

They were the first American group to perform at the Tattoo, and were overwhelmed when they were treated like celebrities by local people. Passers-by stopped to ask for their autographs and people fought to buy them drinks in city pubs.

Their popularity meant they were invited back an unprecedented five times.

Bob Sosinski, 59, an engineer from New Jersey, was just 19 when he performed at the Tattoo in 1968.

He said: "Everybody knew who we were. We used to wear blazers with badges, and we all had short hair. It was the time of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and we stuck out like sore thumbs.

"It was the first time we had been out of the United States. We were stunned to see the city bedecked with American flags.

"We were all extraordinarily well received. People had never seen anything like us. People asked us for autographs, and bought us pints when we went out. We were major celebrities."

Members of the original "trick-drill team" decided to return this year after organising a reunion in Las Vegas.

Ten of the original group will be travelling to Scotland for a week, and are looking forward to renewing friendships and revisiting their old haunts.

Mr Sosinski said: "This seemed the logical thing to do for the anniversary. Everyone has this great fondness for the city.

"I remember going to Greyfriars Bobby and the Malt Shovel, and pubs on Rose Street.

"We were staying at Dregghorn Barracks and the guys from the Black Watch were very friendly. We went to see a show in the Fringe, although it was much, much smaller back then."

On their first visit the team was interviewed by newspapers and appeared in the first colour TV broadcast of the Tattoo.

A newspaper report was headlined "Daring US cadets add spice to spectacle" and described the "amazing 'suicide' rifle-and-bayonet" display.

Their daily performances included whirling their rifles with 14-inch bayonets attached "like the propellers of an aircraft", with the blades coming within inches of cadets' faces.

The cadets also put on a special performance for children at the Princess Margaret Rose Hospital. Despite the rain, nurses brought beds outside and the cadets performed in the muddy grass.

The team members will be travelling from New York, Maine, Pennsylvania and Colorado for the reunion.

This time they will be staying at Pollock Halls at the University of Edinburgh.

More than 217,000 people are expected to attend this year's Tattoo. It is now in its 59th year, and since its inception it has included performers from in excess of 40 different countries.

Looking back, Mr Sosinski said: "The object was to scare the living daylights out of the audience. People did get hurt – I've got my share of stitches."