The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Read about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and its guards. Answer the questions that follow.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery has the remains of soldiers from World War I, World War II, and the Korean Conflict. Each soldier who is buried here was given the Medal of Honor.

The Tomb is guarded by the “Old Guard” and has been guarded continuously since 1937. The soldiers who are given this honor are dedicated and honorable men and women who take their position very seriously. About 80% of the applicants for the “Old Guard” do not qualify and only three women have passed the requirements needed. The height standard is 5’10” for males and 5’8” for females. The guards hold no rank. This is because the rank of the unidentified dead is unknown and it would be inappropriate for the Unknowns to be guarded by someone who outranks them. Guards must memorize seven pages of history on Arlington National Cemetery and then recite it word-for-word before being granted "a walk". Guards are not permitted to speak or break their march unless someone enters the restricted area around the Tomb. These special guards stand watch at the tomb 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They remain on guard during heat waves, blizzards, hurricanes, rain, sleet, snow and hail. Hurricane Isabel was the deadliest, costliest, and strongest hurricane in the 2003 Atlantic hurricane season, but the guards continued with their duties during this difficult night. The welfare of these guards were never put at risk though.

Each guard takes 21 steps down a black mat, turns and faces the Tomb for 21 seconds, changes the position of their rifle to the side away from the Tomb and walks back down the mat 21 steps. Their rifle stays on their side away from the Tomb out of respect for the dead. The number 21 represents a 21 gun salute which is the highest honor given to military men and women. This process is repeated until the soldier is relieved of duty. Each guard is on duty for 30 minutes during the summer and one hour during the winter. When Arlington Cemetery is closed the guards change every two hours. Even when there is no one around during the day, the same procedure is followed exactly.

Questions

1. Are the guards allowed to talk while they are on duty?

2. How many pages of history do the guards have to memorize?

3. What percentage of applicants do not qualify to be a Tomb Guard?

4. Do Tomb Guards stop when it’s raining?

5. Who are the guards guarding?

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