

Dec. 14, 2016

Military to serve ceremonial, security roles in Trump inauguration

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Some 15,000 uniformed servicemembers will serve prominent roles in a series of inaugural events next month when Donald Trump is sworn in as the 45th American president.

Troops will provide a wide variety of functions from ceremonial roles to highlight the pomp and circumstance of the occasion to logistical duties and aiding civilian law enforcement agencies with security procedures for the events that are expected to draw about 800,000 people to the nation's capital Jan. 20, military officials said Wednesday.

The military is no stranger to taking center stage as new presidents take the oath of office. Servicemembers have participated in every inauguration ceremony since they escorted George Washington through the streets of New York City after the nation's first Inauguration Day on April 30, 1789. The armed forces' presence helps demonstrate the military's support for a peaceful transition of power, said Army Maj. Gen. Bradley A. Becker, the commander of Joint Task Force-National Capital Region, which is leading the military's planning for the 58th presidential inauguration.

"Military support for the inauguration is appropriate, traditional and important in honoring our president and commander in chief, while also recognizing our commitment to civilian control of the military," Becker said Wednesday at the Washington D.C. National Guard Armory.

Plans have yet to be finalized for Trump's inauguration, but Joint Task Force-National Capital

Region has been preparing for the ceremony for about eight months based on the traditional preferences of presidents-elect, Becker said.

Trump, who has shown he is anything but a traditional president-elect, has not requested anything unusual to date, said Air Force Brig. Gen. George Degnon, the deputy commander for Inauguration Day planning.

"We are still negotiating with [Trump's inauguration] committee on a number of issues," he said. "But with the city laid out the way it is, there are only so many ways you can make all this happen."

About 5,000 active-duty troops from all of the military's branches will serve ceremonial duties on Inauguration Day. They include servicemembers who will march in the inaugural parade, military bands that will perform during the swearing-in ceremony and at inaugural balls, and more than 1,500 who will line the streets to render a salute to Trump as he moves from Capitol Hill to the White House.

Some 2,000 active-duty troops will serve in behind-the-scenes logistical and support roles, and 8,000 National Guardsmen will be on hand to bolster security for Inauguration Day.

The Army and Air Force National Guard troops come from more than 40 states and territories, including as far away as Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, said Army Maj. Gen. Errol R. Schwartz, the commander of the District of Columbia National Guard who is in charge of those 8,000 troops.

Schwartz emphasized the

National Guardsmen will be attached to civilian law enforcement agencies including the Secret Service, Capitol Police, Washington DC Metropolitan Police and U.S. Park Service Police. The troops will be deputized to perform law enforcement duties in Washington, but they will not carry firearms on Inauguration Day.

The majority of the National Guard formation will consist of Army military police officers and Air Force security forces, Schwartz added.

Planning is underway to prepare for any security issues, such as the potential for unruly protests, he said.

Additional Guard units will be on standby outside of the nation's capital who could be called for added security, if needed.

"We have a very robust plan to support our law enforcement partners," Schwartz said. "But if something goes bad, it is up to the law enforcement agencies to make the first move. Only if needed will they call on the National Guard to support them."

Planners are more concerned about the potential for brutal winter weather on Inauguration Day than the possibility of civil unrest, Becker said. That includes ensuring servicemembers have proper cold-weather attire and are not exposed to the elements more than necessary.

"That's a major concern for us because we'll have servicemembers out there from 3 a.m. that morning until late that night, outdoors," Becker said.