



The road to the 58th U.S. Presidential Inauguration

By Arthur Mondale Pentagram Staff Writer

The president's inauguration is the largest, most publicized quadrennial event in the nation's capital. And since 1789, members of the U.S. military have played an instrumental role.

"This really dates back to 1789 when our military local militia and Revolutionary War veterans escorted President George Washington in New York City," said Maj. Gen. Bradley A. Becker, commander of Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region and U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

Becker recently assumed the role of commanding general of the Joint Task Force – National Capital Region 58th Presidential Inauguration.

To date, 150 of the 820 projected service members from all branches of the U.S. military have arrived at the task force. Their ranks will grow as the January 20th inauguration approaches. At full strength, the task force will lead 5,000 uniformed participants in support of the presidential inauguration.

The task force will fill a significant and highly-visible role in ceremonial support to the inauguration, including the military's five service bands, color guards, salute batteries and honor cordons.

Behind the scenes, there's an even larger operational support element; chemical, biological incident response force, explosive ordnance disposal and counter-improvised explosive device capability teams, logistics, planning, and more.

"Having been in places where a peaceful transition of power doesn't necessarily take place routinely, a presidential inauguration is a great symbol that Americans should be proud of," Becker said. "Every four years either a new administration, or an administration staying for a second term, will transfer power and through that peaceful transfer of power the military will reaffirm our support to the Constitution and our civilian leadership."

Come Inauguration Day, the Military District of Washington commander historically assumes one of the military's most visible ceremonial roles — leading service members from all branches of the Armed Forces in formation down Pennsylvania Avenue during the first pass-and-review

of the new president's term, and rendering the first salute to the newly sworn-in commander-in-chief.

But before that day comes, the international display of democratic American values will require months of planning that begin even before the new president is elected.

Inaugural logistics

Becker and his task force have already had meetings with inter-agency partners; members of Congress the Secret Service, the FBI, U.S. Capitol Police, the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia, and others.

The joint task force will work closely with and in support of the political entities that guide all inauguration week activities: The Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC), a committee selected by the president-elect, which will stand up shortly after the election in November and the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JICC), a committee in charge of events happening on Capitol Hill only, which began operating in May.

"We serve the role of supporting the two other entities," said Cmdr. Jonathan Blyth, deputy director of public affairs for the task force. "The armed forces provides continuity every four years while always recognizing this is a peaceful transition of power."

The president-elect's committee will have final authority in regards to who participates in the parades, how many balls will happen, and ultimately other roles the Armed Forces will fulfill. But the task force can plan ahead for elements that are typically part of the festivities — ceremonial bands, for example, have performed in almost every inauguration in modern history, Blyth said.

Other specifics won't be decided until after the president is elected. Becker will have 73 days to provide the new president with plenty of options. Following Election Day, a large percentage of task force staff will move to a location in downtown D.C. where the PIC will also be headquartered.

"There's only one event that has to take place constitutionally, and that's the swearing in of the president. Everything else is at

the discretion of the president-elect and the PIC," Becker said. "We will work with the PIC and we will execute whatever their vision for this presidential inauguration is."

Generally, members of the PIC have limited experience with planning such an event, and only a general idea of what an inauguration "should" look like, so the joint task force's recommendations will likely help shape what will happen Inauguration Day. But changes are not unheard of, Becker said.

During the second inauguration of President Ronald Reagan in 1985, the fanfare and pageantry traditionally seen on the National Mall was brought indoors because of the extreme cold. The president was sworn-in inside the Capitol Rotunda, instead.

As November approaches, Becker is meeting every two weeks with lead directorates and new members who join the task force.

A rehearsal of concept (ROC) drill will take place in December at the National D.C. Armory. The task force uses a 60-by-40 foot planning map of Washington, D.C. to walk through the entire Inauguration Day process.

"They will walk through line by line, minute by minute, every aspect of every moving part of the inauguration," Blyth said.

The Sunday before the inauguration, a full dress rehearsal will take place beginning before sunrise. On Inauguration Day, duties for most task force members begin at 3 a.m.

More than 5,000 service members will support the inauguration ceremonially, and several hundred more will provide operational support as part of the joint task force. The National Guard will have an additional 8,000 to 9,000 service members assigned to support law enforcement, security, and crowd management operations. Collectively, they will likely represent military personnel from every U.S. state and territory, and every branch of service.

"These service members who are part of the Joint Task Force will represent the more than two-million men and women of our armed services [on inauguration day]," Becker said.