

Shilo soldiers prepping to guard the Queen

Drew May, Brandon Sun, 18 Sep 2021



Soldiers from the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery are getting ready to stand guard outside some of the United Kingdom's most important landmarks.

To celebrate the regiment's 150th birthday, the Queen sent an invitation to the unit — the majority of which is based at Canadian Forces Base Shilo — to mount the guard outside Buckingham Palace, St. James Palace, Windsor

Castle and the Tower of London.

"It is an incredible honour for The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, and this is something we're all looking forward to," Capt. Ryan Gibney, who oversees the Windsor Castle guard, said.

More than 130 soldiers from the regiment will form the rotation of guard units outside the official royal residences. A typical day starts with the change-of-the-guard ceremony, where the old guard is relieved by the new guard, Gibney said.

"That's the biggest tourist attraction," he said. "After that, it's just the rotation of sentries outside of all these residences every two hours."

The soldiers are tasked with making sure the royal family is safe and to help police in case they are needed.

"Our sentries have to be ready for constant cameras on them and people looking to talk to them and take pictures with them. They've been briefed on how to deal with that, and I don't have any doubt they will be professional when they are on sentry," he said.

While Gibney said he is both excited and nervous, the regiment went through two weeks of training from soldiers in the UK's First Battalion Grenadier Guards.

The British trainers taught the Canadian soldiers the different drill movements for each of the four locations they will be posted. Gibney said he "couldn't be happier" with the training.

"Without them, we would have struggled a lot more to get ready. But just in the two weeks they were here, we went from working on personal drill and just getting ready, to [now being] ready to mount the Queen's guard. After they were here we felt ready to do it," he said.

There are some differences between Canadian and British drills, which Gibney said took some getting used to. For example, in Canadian drills, soldiers move on the last word or syllable of a command, but in British drills, they move as soon as the command is said. Some words also have different meanings in the two militaries.

"This has been happening for over 500 years in different forms... there are different things we have to learn that we've never done before," he said, adding everyone embraced the challenge of something new.

"That was one of the biggest things that UK drill instructors were working with us on and getting us to react together in a different way we're not used to doing."

There were also some changes to the uniforms the soldiers will wear when they mount the Queen's Guard, called the patrol dress. It's not new to the regiment, Gibney said, but it hasn't been in service for some time.

An Artillery Master Tailor from the British military came to CFB Shilo to help the base's tailor get the uniforms ready. Gibney said volunteers from the Royal Canadian Artillery Museum also helped with the uniforms.

"She came in and she knew exactly what she needed to do and how to do it and in two weeks, she was able to sort out approximately 100 uniforms," he said.

The uniforms are royal blue in colour and the "highlight" of them is chainmail on the shoulder, Gibney said. The chainmail is a relic of when the artillery soldiers still rode horses.

The visit is to celebrate the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery's 150th anniversary. A and B Batteries were formed in 1871 as a regular part of Canada's military.

The Royal Canadian Regiment previously mounted the guard outside the royal residences in 2018.

Gibney said it is tradition for the captain of the unit standing guard at Windsor Castle to meet the queen for lunch, but he is unsure whether it will go ahead as planned.

"This is something that the regiment will remember. I would argue — I might be biased — this is the big event... so I'm very happy to play a role."

The soldiers from CFB Shilo are set to be in the UK until late October.