

Excerpts from:
INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUARDS AND PICKETS, 3ND EDITION

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DJD's Note: It has been noted that many men are not prepared for guard duty (especially on how to challenge), whether in camp or in the presence of the enemy. The following, taken from **Instructions for Guards and Pickets**, provides a brief explanation of the duty of the members of the guard. The full book, "IGP," may be had from: AoP Press • PO Box 1863 • Goleta, CA 93116 - \$17 ppd.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. One of the most important duties of a soldier is **Guard Duty**. It is upon the vigilance of the Guard that the security of a camp, and in turn of an Army, and ultimately of a nation, depends. Without a diligent Guard, the Army may never have the opportunity to meet the enemy fairly on the field.

...

4. The term **Guard** ... refers to the body of soldiers assigned to that duty. When on post, individual soldiers are referred to as **sentinels** or **sentries**; **sentinels** are members of the **Guard**.

5. Guards are ideally relieved every 24 hours, each man serving four two-hour shifts, unless weather or other circumstances require longer or shorter tours. ... Living history units may find that one-hour shifts are preferable, allowing more men to serve and to keep the sentinels better alert.

6. The Guard of a Regiment (Battalion) in camp is generally composed of a lieutenant and a sergeant (or two) of the Guard, three corporals, two musicians, and enough privates to cover all the sentry posts three times over. The Guard is divided into three reliefs, ...

7. While seemingly a monotonous duty, it must be remembered that Guard is the most noble duty a soldier can perform - watching over his comrades as they rest or go about their duties.

...

Kautz further reminds us that ...

No nobler death can fall to the lot of a soldier; whilst no greater ignominy can befall him than to desert his post in time of danger, when the lives of others are dependent upon the performance of his duty.¹

Watchwords

8. The **countersign** and **parole** are issued daily from the headquarters of the local command, whether that be the Post, Battalion, Brigade, Division, &c. If necessary, a series of **watchwords** may be sent for several days.

9. The **countersign**, usually the name of a battle, is the "password"² given only to those who are permitted to visit and pass the line of sentries at night (e.g., officers and NCOs on duty), and to members of the Guard. It is not given to interior sentinels unless by order. Soldiers who need to pass the line of sentinels must generally

¹ Kautz, August V., *Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers*, 1864, Para. 93.

² In modern parlance, the **countersign** consists of a "secret challenge" from the Sentinel, and the "password" from the party being challenged (e.g., Sentinel: "Apple," and Party: "Pie") [*Guard Duty*, U.S. Army Field Manual 22-6, 1971]. By the 1861 *Regulations*, the Civil War countersign consists only of the "password," the sentinel simply challenging the party to give the countersign; the sentinel does not give a "watchword" / ["secret challenge"] (Para. 145).

have a pass to do so. See **Challenging, Para. 145, et seq.**

10. The **parole**, often the name of a general, is given only to the commander of the Guard, and other officers who may visit, inspect and give orders to the Guard, and make Grand Rounds. These "other officers" are the Officer of the Day and the Guard's parent unit Commander, meaning the Commanders of the Battalion, Brigade, &c., to which the Guard belongs. This does not include company officers; although a company provides soldiers for the Guard, the Guard belongs to the Battalion, not the Company. Exceptions to this are: if the company officer is the Officer of the Day or the Officer of the Guard, or if the company is stationed alone.

11. Any officer or soldier who gives the **parole** or **countersign** to someone not authorized to receive it, or gives "a parole or watchword different from what he received, shall suffer death, or such other punishment as shall be ordered by ... general court-martial."³

12. If the **countersign** is lost, or a sentinel deserts, the Officer of the Guard will immediately change it, and report that fact to his superior.

...

Duties of the Members of the Guard

Sentinels

91. When a soldier is assigned to a post, he is called a **sentinel** or **sentry**; the **Guard** is the detail of soldiers assigned to that duty.

92. Sentinels only take orders from, and only allow themselves to be relieved by, an officer or NCO of their own Guard, the Officer of the Day, or the Commander of the unit to which the Guard belongs (Battalion, Brigade, &c.). If one of the latter cases, the Officer of the Guard must be immediately notified by that officer.

93. Under no circumstances may a sentinel leave his guard until regularly relieved or excused by a NCO or officer authorized to give him orders.

94. A sentinel needing to absent himself does so by request through his Corporal of the Guard, who replaces him with another man, or takes the post himself, until the sentinel returns. Posts must never be left unoccupied; no sentinel is to leave his post for any reason without orders.

95. The members of the Guard, both officers and enlisted men, do not remove their accoutrements or clothing while on duty (all 24 hours).

96. All persons, of any rank, must respect the sentinels. Conversely, sentinels should in no way abuse their authority; nor should they obey illegal orders - the mere act of "obeying" is not justifiable, and thus they may be held accountable.

97. Sentinels must remain on alert, observing everything that takes place within sight and hearing of their posts. They are to report every breach of general or camp orders and regulations, such as discharging weapons in camp, drunkenness, gambling, &c. No sentinel should leave his post or hold conversations not necessary to his duties.

98. The sentinel walks the beat that is indicated to him and prevents damage to any public property, including houses, fences, trees, &c., unless by order. If he cannot do so without leaving his post, he calls for the

"Corporal of the Guard, Post No. ___."

³ "Articles of War," Article 53.

99. Sentinels carry their weapons (loaded, bayonets fixed⁴) at *Support*, or on either shoulder. They never give their arms to another, nor allow them to touch the ground, unless by order of an Officer or NCO of the Guard. They *Secure Arms* in wet weather.

100. Again, sentinels *Present Arms* to all field officers (Majors and above), the Battalion Commander and the Officer of the Day. For line officers (Captains and below), they come to *Attention*, and *Shoulder Arms*. No courtesies are given when the sentinels are to **challenge**.

101. Sentinels repeat all calls from posts more distant from the Guard's main body.

...
102. After *Retreat* (about sunset), or when visibility is otherwise limited, and until broad daylight, and during other hours set by the Commander, the sentinels **challenge** with *Arms Port*. They come to the *Ready* if anyone advances without the proper *countersign*, allowing no one nearer than the tip of their bayonet.

103. In case of a fire, the sentinel discharges his piece, and yells "**Fire**," followed by his post number. If another emergency, the sentinel discharges his piece, and calls for the Guard. In either case, the Guard immediately *turns out*, and it, or a part, moves toward the alarmed sentry.

104. A sentinel's duties are of two types: *general* (for all posts) and *special* (for a particular post). He should be able to give or paraphrase these orders when called upon to do so by his Commander, Officer of the Day, or the Officer or an NCO of the Guard.

105. The *general* orders for sentinels at all posts are as follows:

I am required to take charge of this post and all public property in view; to salute all officers passing, according to rank; to give the alarm in case of fire, or the approach of an enemy, or any disturbance whatsoever; to report all violations of the Articles of War, Regulations of the Army, or camp or garrison orders; at night, to challenge all persons approaching my post, and to allow no one to pass without the countersign until they are examined by an officer or non-commissioned officer of the guard.⁵

The diligence with which the sentinel performs these duties is indicative of his qualities as a soldier.

106. *Special* orders are peculiar to each post. For instance, when guarding commissary or quartermaster stores:

My special orders are to take charge of all these stores, and to allow no one to interfere with or take them away, except by direction of the quartermaster [or commissary] sergeant, or the quartermaster [or commissary] himself.⁶

Or, at the place where prisoners are kept, the orders may be:

My special orders are to take charge of all prisoners and allow no one to molest or converse with those in my charge; to ensure all directed punishments are executed, and to use any force necessary to prevent escape; and to call out the Guard and direct the Officer of the Day to the Officer [Sergeant, if he is the commander] of the Guard.⁷

107. Kautz reminds the sentinel of the importance of his duties:

To be surprised, or fall asleep, in times of danger is a crime of the gravest character, and punishable with death. Sometimes, when popular violence is threatened, the courage and firmness of a single sentinel may intimidate and keep back a mob, whilst timidity and doubt might encourage them.⁸

⁴ For safety at living history events, it is highly recommended that weapons not be loaded and bayonets not be fixed during hours of darkness.

⁵ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 78.

⁶ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 79.

⁷ Harness, Steven M., "2nd Infantry Regiment, California Volunteers: Guard Instructions," 1994.

⁸ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 94.

Corporal of the Guard

108. *Guard duty* "is the most important duty that falls to the corporal. He should be perfectly familiar with the duties of the sentinel, and able to instruct the members of the guard in their duties."⁹

109. In general, there is a Corporal for each relief. Each Corporal *parades* his relief, instructs it, and posts it. In a small Guard, there may be but one Corporal (or two); if so, he must post all the reliefs himself.

110. The Corporal of the Guard answers the sentinels of his own relief when they call for the

"Corporal of the Guard, Post No. ___."

If the Corporal is responding to a call, and another sentinel calls for the Corporal, the Corporal of another relief answers it. There should be an NCO on alert at the Guard House at all times.

111. Like the sentinels, Corporals of the Guard take orders only from their Battalion (Brigade, &c.) Commander, the Officer of the Day, and the Officer and NCOs of the Guard.

112. As the Corporal is responsible for the instruction of his relief, he visits his sentinels - makes the rounds - on their first tour (both the first-day and first-night tours), and until they know and perform their duties well. All the Corporals should make the rounds during the first relief to familiarize themselves with the area that they are to guard.

113. The Corporal is to report all neglect of duty or disobedience of orders by members of the Guard to its commander. However, discretion should be used; it may be best to only warn the sentinel at the first offense, if minor. Any repeated offense must be reported.

114. The Corporal of the relief at twilight (or whenever the sentinels start to *challenge*) gets the *countersign* from the Officer of the Guard, and gives it to the sentinels of his relief. The *countersign* is afterwards passed on at each post by the old sentinel to the new one when the sentinels are relieved.

Sergeant of the Guard

115. The Sergeant of the Guard ensures that the duties of the Guard are carried out. He supervises the Corporals, and ensures that they understand their instructions, respond promptly to the sentinels' calls, and post the reliefs at the proper times. With many posts, the Sergeant helps to post the reliefs.

...

117. The Sergeant of the Guard prepares the *Guard Report*, in a Guard Report Book ...

Musician of the Guard

121. Musicians take their turn at the Guard House for beating (sounding) the calls. One or two musicians are detailed, and in camp or garrison sound the musician's call when all the musicians are to gather.¹⁰ ...

Officer of the Guard

122. The Officer of the Guard is responsible for the general supervision of the Guard and the security of the prisoners and public property placed in his charge. He should keep a record of all those who pass through his post.

123. He must be familiar with the duties of the Guard NCOs and sentinels so that he can ensure that they fulfill their responsibilities. The Officer visits the sentinels - **makes the rounds** - day and night (indicating when he will return to the Guard House), maintains military order in the Guard, and orders patrols and NCO *rounds* when necessary.

...

⁹ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 326.

¹⁰ This is general; the drummers of the Police Guard beat the *drummer's call* to assemble the Field Music 15 minutes before each of the daily camp calls (or the bugler sounds the appropriate music).

Challenging

145. The sentinels *challenge*, during periods of limited visibility - generally after *Retreat* (about sunset) and until broad daylight - and at other times when they are instructed to do so, anyone who approaches their posts or attempts to cross their beat.

146. When a party approaches his post, the sentinel comes to *Port Arms*, and *challenges*:

“HALT. Who comes there?”

repeating the warning, if necessary. If the party responds, “*Friend*,” and, if the sentinel has authority to pass individuals or parties, the sentinel further states:

“Advance, friend, with the countersign.”

The “friend” will then need to give (whisper) the correct *countersign*. If he gives the wrong *countersign*, or none, the sentinel comes to the *Ready*, and calls for the:

“Corporal of the Guard, Post No. ___.”

The sentinel allows no one within range of his bayonet without the *countersign*.¹¹

147. If the party responds, “*Friends*,” the sentinel orders:

“Halt, friends.

Advance, one, with the countersign.”

If more than one advance, or if there is no response, or an incorrect one, the sentinel comes to *Ready*, halts the party, and calls for the “*Corporal of the Guard*.”

148. If the response is “*Relief*,” “*Patrol*,” or “*Rounds*,” the sentinel states:

“Halt, Relief (Patrol, Rounds).

Advance, Corporal, with the countersign”.¹²

Again, if more than one advance, or there is no response, the sentinel comes to *Ready*, and calls for the Corporal of the Guard. When the NCO of the *Relief (Patrol, Rounds)* has given the *countersign*, the sentinel announces:

“Advance, Relief (Patrol, Rounds).”

149. If the sentinel is not authorized to pass anyone, he halts the party and immediately calls for the Corporal. Or if he has not received the *countersign* by the time he is to start *challenging*, he halts the party anyway, and calls for the Corporal.

150. A sentinel should not allow himself to be placed at a disadvantage. He should *challenge* when the party is sufficiently far away from him, and cause mounted parties to dismount. Unfriendly parties, or other parties unknown to him, should not be allowed to come within the range of his bayonet.

151. A sentinel should also take care that although an individual may give the proper *countersign*, he may not in fact be authorized to pass the lines - strictly, only those *on duty* who need to cross the line of sentries are given the *countersign*. If there is a doubt, especially when the party is unfamiliar to the sentinel, he should call for the Corporal; it is best to be safe.¹³

¹¹ For safety, bayonets should **NOT** be fixed at night.

¹² Per *U.S. Army Regulations*, Para. 425. On the other hand, per the *Regulations*, Para. 624 (for “Grand Guards and other Outposts,”) the sentinel says:

Stand: Advance one with the countersign.”

¹³ Reenacting units may wish to “open” the line of sentinels to members of their own Battalion, in which case all members should be made aware of the *countersign*.

Grand Rounds

152. *Grand Rounds* is when the Officer of the Day, Commander, or a general officer, goes about the chain of sentinels and inspects the condition and vigilance of the Guard. The Officer of the Guard and the NCOs should regularly visit their sentinels, more commonly referred to as simply, *rounds*.

153. When an Officer wishes to make the *Grand Rounds* during the hours of *challenging*, he will take an escort of an NCO (sergeant) and two men. When a sentinel (not at the Guard House) *challenges*:

“HALT. Who comes there?”

the NCO answers, “*Grand Rounds*.” Upon direction from the sentinel to:

“Halt, Grand Rounds.

Advance, Sergeant, with the countersign.”

the sergeant advances and gives the *countersign*. If correct, the sentinel then says, “*Advance, Rounds*,” and comes to *Shouldered Arms* (the marching salute) until the party passes

...

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ENEMY

Grand Guards and Pickets

199. In the presence of the enemy, and on campaign, in addition to Camp Guards, there are Grand Guards, outposts, pickets and reconnaissances. The sentinel’s “presence of mind, good judgment, and courage on these duties are put to the greatest test.”¹⁴

200. For a soldier, “duties in the field are nothing more than the practical application of the duties he has learned in camp or garrison to the purposes of war.”¹⁵

201. *Grand Guards* are detailed during war from each Brigade to protect the main body while at rest. Ceremony is generally dispensed with, or modified according to circumstance, the overwhelming purpose being to watch the enemy. In American service, Grand Guard is also called *Picket Duty*, the outermost sentinels being called *Pickets*.

202. Grand Guards are posted in the direction of the enemy, and cover the approaches to the camp. They are placed near enough to quickly warn the main body of the enemy’s advance, but far enough away to delay the enemy so that the main body may be formed. This distance from camp depends on the command’s strength, the nature of the country, and the proximity of the enemy.

203. The ground, the country, the proximity of the enemy, and other circumstances also dictate the strength of the Guard, its composition, and how it is deployed. Grand Guards of infantry are usually supplemented with a few mounted cavalymen to act as couriers and scouts.

204. The Grand Guard of a Brigade is generally commanded by a Captain, and is under the general supervision of the Field Officer of the Day. ...

General Instructions

...213. The Grand Guard is posted to defend a pass or natural approach, or on centrally located high ground, if possible (to conceal its strength and better observe the front). Three lines are established: the outermost *Pickets*, their *Supports*, and the *Reserve*, which is the “head-quarters” of the Grand Guard.

¹⁴ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 120.

¹⁵ *Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers*, Para. 119.

214. When posted near the enemy at day, the Guard (especially the line of Pickets) withdraws to a post further in rear at night. Small posts are established in rear of the Guard (towards the camp) when the nature of the ground and its inhabitants require. The Division Commander ensures the Grand Guards of his Brigades, &c., cover one another.

215. Compliments are dispensed with on Picket duty.

216. Grand Guards have *special* and *general* orders. In general, they will

inform the nearest posts and the field officer of the day, or the General of Brigade, of the march and movements of the enemy, and of the attacks they receive or fear; to examine every person passing near the post, particularly those coming from without; to arrest suspicious person, and all soldiers and camp-followers who try to pass out without permission, and to send to the General, unless otherwise directed, all country people who come in.¹⁶

...
218. At times, a Reserve may not be required, such as when the main body is under arms, or the lines are close, as when the armies are entrenched.

219. At night, picked men are sent forward to watch key approaches. To better observe, and for their own safety, they move about. They inform the Guard of the approach of the enemy via signals and retreat by predetermined routes.

...
222. An hour before daybreak, infantry Grand Guards are all under arms.

223. Fires at the Reserve are hidden, and they are not permitted on the line of Supports. Fires are sometimes built on unoccupied ground to deceive the enemy. Horses are watered by detachments.

224. If an unknown body of men tries to enter the camp without the Guard commander's prior knowledge, or without written orders to the Officer of the Grand Guard, or is not known to him, the party is stopped, and its commander sent to the Field Officer of the Day; nearby posts are warned of the party's presence.

225. When the enemy attacks, the Pickets, Supports and Reserve defend their respective posts for as long as possible before retiring, unmasking their parent unit when they do retire (Pickets unmask Supports, &c).

...
231. Deserters are disarmed at the Advanced Posts (Supports), and are sent to the Commander of the Grand Guard at the Reserve, who questions them. If they come in at night, they may be sent to the Field Officer of the Day in the morning. Suspicious individuals are searched by the commanders of the posts.

...
235. "Courage and common sense are the principal requisites for a picket."¹⁷ Visits by his Guard and Support chiefs often give the Picket encouragement.

Pickets

236. Pickets should be posted at places

- (1) where they can see furthest,
- (2) where they are out of sight of the enemy, and,
- (3) where they are in communication with each other and their Supports.

While listed in order of "importance," it is ideal that all three are satisfied. If a Picket post is out of communication, a corporal and three men are posted,¹⁸ or the number of Pickets is increased. It is often better not to be seen than to see far.

237. A Picket should always be ready to fire; ...[and] be sure of the

presence of an enemy before he fires; ... he must fire, though all defense on his part be useless, as the safety of the post may depend on it. Sentinels fire on all persons deserting to the enemy.¹⁹

238. Each Picket should be well-instructed on his duties, which are, in general, to watch a certain area in front of his post for enemy movements and to keep unauthorized persons from passing his line.

239. Pickets receive the *countersign* before sunset, and whether they do or not, start *challenging* at that time. They may be ordered to *challenge* at all times.

240. When parties approach at night, the Picket orders, "HALT." If the party does not halt, the sentinel fires. If the party halts, the Picket calls:

"Who goes there?"

...If more than one advances, or the correct *countersign* is not given, the Picket fires, and falls back to the Guard.

241. When the sentinel over the arms *challenges*, the Guard of the post is *turned out*, and the Corporal immediately investigates.

242. To hide the position of the sentinel, the hail to "HALT" may be replaced by signals - the sentinel giving the first one to halt the party, the party giving the counter signal.

243. If the enemy suddenly advances, the Picket must fire ... to warn the other Pickets and Supports, even at the risk of his own safety. The Pickets then act as a line of skirmishers. When forced to withdraw, the Pickets should move to the flanks of the Support, enabling the Support to fire;

244. Bearers of flags (of truce) are not allowed past the outer Pickets, and are made to face away from the lines; if they must pass into the lines, their eyes are bandaged, and an NCO stays with them. Deserters coming into the lines are disarmed. If many deserters appear at night, they are let in carefully, a few at a time. Parties leaving the lines must prove that they are authorized to do so.

245. "The practice of pickets firing upon those of the enemy is barbarous; and retaliation is scarcely a sufficient excuse... . Pickets should not fire unless an advance is intended," or threatened. "Firing on pickets has a tendency to produce false alarms."²⁰

246. Communicating with the enemy Pickets should not be practiced, unless by an officer's order to gain information or another objective.

247. A system of signals should be established so that the Pickets may warn the Supports; whether they be sight or sound, the signals should be few and simple. Discharging a weapon should always mean an attack.

248. During the day, sentinels are posted on high ground, and communication is often by signals (such as raising the cap or handkerchief). At night, they move to low ground so they can see silhouettes against the sky, and so that they themselves are not seen.

249. To reduce the number of *rounds* ... and to keep the men alert, Pickets are often relieved *hourly*. To prevent them from being surprised, pre-determined signals (e.g., slapping the musket, clapping hands, &c.) from the relief to indicate its presence proceed the *countersign*.

Patrols

...
267. Patrols within the lines consist of three or four men, sent to search areas unseen by the sentinels, and to keep them alert.

268. Patrols sent outside the lines are to find the enemy, to determine his strength and intended movements, and to scout the countryside, and so are made with as much secrecy as possible. The Supports and Pickets are warned of the Patrol's presence.

269. Patrols are not sent to fight. If the Patrol finds the enemy, it should avoid being discovered. Even if a smaller force is found, the Patrol should not attack unless capturing a prisoner would help to acquire information.

¹⁶ U.S. Army Regulations, Para. 616.

¹⁷ Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers, Para. 126.

¹⁸ This is per the Regulations; Gen'l. Order No. 69 assigns 3 men to each "post" in any situation.

¹⁹ U.S. Army Regulations, Para. 621.

²⁰ Customs of Service for NCOs and Soldiers, Paras. 133-134.