

Inside the White House – the Marine Sentries

December 28, 2009. (4 min. 6 sec.)

00:00

(music playing)

00:23

We're White House NCOs, White House sentries, and our main post is staying outside the West Wing lobby to represent the President whenever he's in the West Wing working.

00:41

There're four of us here.

We work 30-minute shifts, 30 minutes on, 30 minutes off.

00:45

(SGT. J. D. Hodges - U.S. Marine Corps)

Whenever the President gets in, we post as soon as he's in the Oval Office – or soon as he's in the West Wing, we'll post, And we'll be here until the President's done for the day.

01:01

My name is Corporal James Applewhite.

I've been at the White House for just a couple months now.

I'm the rookie, that's correct.

(CPL. James Applewhite - U.S. Marine Corps)

01:08

(CPL. James Applewhite's first day)

The way it works is basically whenever the President is in the West Wing, we're going to be on the post.

And we'll open the door when people come in and when people leave.

01:16

And obviously you don't have eyes in the back of your head.

So when people leave, the Secret Service officer, they'll be sitting here.

01:21

And one buzzer represents a person coming out.

You here that?

Um-hmm.

One-buzz.

01:26

If the President leaves the West Wing for anything, we'll come inside and stand by inside for, you know, however long.

01:32

And it's going to be three buzzes, just three buzzes.

Open it, just come on in.

No big deal.

01:38

The White House post is one of those posts they tell you about, but no one ever expects to come here.

It's very selective.

There're only four marines in the entire Marine Corps that get to do it.

So I was pretty lucky to get the position.

01:48

My first morning at the White House, it was kind of like a dream.

You know, you walk in, the Secret Service lets you through.

You feel like a VIP.

01:55

Little nervous, but more just an overwhelming sense of curiosity of everything around me.

02:00

There's so much history jam packed into this small area.
It just overwhelms you.

02:06

Left face. Now we're both facing this way –

02:09

It's almost you want to
pinch yourself when you're walking in through the Rose
Garden and you see the President sitting at his desk working, and
you see people you see every single day on the news and
you're opening the door for them all of a sudden, within a foot
away from them, almost surreal.

02:22

And it's still pretty neat coming in to work.
You're pinching yourself sometimes.

02:25

Right over here, usually will have half a dozen cameras
set up over there.

02:29

And they're filming constantly.
So that's good motivation to stay still, not twitch.

02:34

Basically I got here and they said, you know, there's no
talking, no smiling, no laughing on post.
So that's all there is to it.

02:40

So if you got an itch on the nose, you know, just suck it up.
It's hard sometimes, but if any Marine went to Parris Island,
they can learn not to scratch for a few minutes.

So it's okay.

02:50

Two Christmas ago, Byas was out here.

And during Christmas time they'll set out two huge
Christmas trees out here.

And it was blowing around, this Christmas tree fell over.

And Byas had good composure, good bearing
and didn't move at all.

03:03

It was on You Tube somewhere.

So you never know where your face is going to end up on TV,
so that's good motivation to, you know, represent yourself
well, represent the Marine Corps,
and represent the President.

03:15

My friends give me a little bit of grief for being
a doorman here.

But I tell them at least I'm the President's doorman.

I've got the best doorman credentials in the world.

I can go work at the Waldorf after this, I guess,
if I wanted to.

03:26

What I tell them is, okay, how many times a day do you get
to see the Vice President or the President of the United States
or any of the dignitaries.

It's just a really honorable position to be in.

03:36

(music playing)